

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Ambassador John Condon
Conducted by Richard Verrone
May 7, 2003; May 8, 2003
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre**

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm doing an oral history interview
2 with Amb. John Condon. Today is May 7th, 2003. It is approximately 10:45AM Central
3 Standard Time. Both of us, we are here in the Special Collections Library interview
4 room on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Sir, let's start with
5 some basic biographical information on yourself. Could you tell us when and where you
6 were born and a little bit about your childhood?

7 John Condon: Good. I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the sixth of August,
8 1920. My mother and father came from a little village in Peloponnese. My father came in
9 the early 1880s to the United States. My mother came in 1911 at the age of eleven years
10 old. I am the oldest of the family. There is another brother who was born a year and a
11 half later, twenty-five March 1922. Then for family reasons my mother took both the
12 boys back to Greece and where we lived until 1945. I went to all the schooling in Greece
13 and in the University of Athens where I got the law degree and were caught in Greece
14 during the German occupation. We suffered as much as the rest of the Greek people.
15 Fortunately, the fact that we were American citizens did not reach the Germans, or if they
16 did they ignored it because we were young. But nevertheless we suffered the hardships
17 and they were tremendous. I will never forget going in downtown Athens and seeing
18 corpses of people who have died during the night for lack of food. Then as soon as
19 Greece was liberated the consul general gave us the help that we needed to get back to
20 the States. We got back to the States back into Tulsa. Then my brother went to Columbia
21 and I went to Chicago University.

22 RV: Before we go there, how long were you actually in Tulsa?

23 JC: 1920 to 1926, six years.

1 RV: Okay. Do you have any memories of Tulsa, Oklahoma?

2 JC: Yes, I do have—I have an image of the house where we lived, which

3 unfortunately does not exist any more. It has become a parking lot. I do have memories

4 happy memories, of my mother and father; of my father coming back from work. My

5 mother did not work. I remember playing with my younger brother and nothing very

6 specific, but the memory of a happy childhood was again and repeating the image of our

7 house. That has remained rather vivid. As a result I have retained an attachment to Tulsa

8 as really my birthplace and my hometown. That's why now we never miss an

9 opportunity to come and visit Tulsa and stay there.

10 RV: Do you still have relatives in Tulsa?

11 JC: We still have a number of relatives, the closer one being first cousin because

12 my father had a brother who was with him in Tulsa. This is the only son and he became a

13 mathematician, got his PhD degree in mathematics in Oklahoma City. Then he started

14 working after teaching for a few years with the college of Tulsa and rose now to become

15 in effect the vice president of the Tulsa college, very successful in the education. As of

16 last December he became a deacon of the Orthodox Church of Tulsa because he was

17 inclined to be religious. He has always helped in the mass and the altar service, now he

18 has officiated that by being ordained deacon. He has a double life, one secular at the

19 university and another one religious in the Orthodox Church of Tulsa.

20 RV: What did your father do for a living in Tulsa?

21 JC: What every Greek did at that time, restaurant.

22 RV: Ah, restaurant, okay.

23 JC: Yes, yes. That's a very small, very small of course a very small restaurant,

24 but he was able to make a living and to keep us going. The same with the father of my

25 cousin. They were together for awhile and then they separated, but they both had small

26 restaurants. I repeat they did very well. Both are dead now and buried in Tulsa. We visit

27 the cemetery every time we have an opportunity.

28 RV: Do you remember the restaurant?

29 JC: No.

30 RV: You don't?

1 JC: No. I don't remember the restaurant. I don't remember the restaurant. My
2 father died before my uncle. They were two different personalities. I think the better one
3 was the uncle and we have more fun memories of both myself and my wife because she
4 had a chance to meet him of Uncle Tom, a very generous, warm, engaging person.

5 RV: So you have vivid memories of him.

6 JC: Very vivid memories of him. Unfortunately his wife became totally blind. So
7 he had the charge of keeping the restaurant going, at the same time caring for his blind
8 wife, eventually his younger son, but everything worked out well and has died. Cousin
9 John is a very successful, well known figure in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

10 RV: Very good, very good. So at age six you went to Greece, with your brother
11 and your mother.

12 JC: Correct.

13 RV: Do you remember the flight and that whole transfer?

14 JC: No. We went by ship and I do remember that, yes. My uncle accompanied
15 us. Yes, he wanted to go back to Greece for a visit. He took advantage of the
16 opportunity that we were going and it would be of help to my mother and ourselves. So I
17 do remember by the ship, impressed by the, what looked to be an enormous boat. I
18 remember my uncle also looked at that, always afraid that we might fall in the sea, but
19 there was good memory of traveling and crossing the ocean. From there on the memories
20 disappear a little bit until we started going to school.

21 RV: In Greece.

22 JC: In Greece.

23 RV: Now, tell me about the Greek school system. Is it similar at all to the United
24 States school system?

25 JC: No. It's the European system meaning that centrally it's a national system,
26 national system that's centrally controlled. The teachers at all levels are state employees.
27 The programs are coming out of the Ministry of Education. It's totally—but the
28 personalities of the teachers of course will play a role and that's where the differentiation
29 takes place.

30 RV: What are your earliest memories of school?

31 JC: Earliest memories.

1 RV: Well, where do your memories pick up? You said there was a gap there.

2 JC: Yes, right. They pick up with the not necessarily the first days in school
3 because by the time when we got there I did not speak any Greek at all. So there was a
4 problem. We didn't speak Greek at home.

5 RV: What about your mother?

6 JC: She spoke Greek, but she having arrived in the United States at the age of
7 eleven she became totally fluent and more comfortable in English than in Greek.
8 Therefore at home we never spoke Greek. So there was the question, but I don't
9 remember any dramatic experience which is interesting perhaps, dramatic experience of
10 learning Greek. I don't remember being the frustrated handicapped for any period of
11 time because of the—which confirms what everybody knows how quickly children adjust
12 and pick up the language without going through the trauma or frustration for not knowing
13 it.

14 RV: So you remember just speaking Greek at some point?

15 JC: At some point exactly. Wt some point speaking Greek, all right. No, it's a
16 good point to make. You helped me do it that I have no memory I repeat again of the
17 trauma of being in an environment that you don't speak the language.

18 RV: Very good. Now, did you live alone, was it just your mother and your
19 brother and yourself?

20 JC: Yes, but we lived first with my grandmother, her mother.

21 RV: Do you have memories of her?

22 JC: Oh, yes, yes for sure.

23 RV: Tell me about her.

24 JC: She was a colorful figure, a colorful figure, short to rather, not really stocky,
25 but full woman, but always optimistic, always with a ready laughter, not smile, ready
26 laughter for this, always caring for us, but not in the obsessive manner that the Greek
27 grandmothers are known for and dreaded for. So in a very relaxed manner, never and I
28 don't recall a single memory of my grandmother forcing us to eat something or to eat
29 more of something. Which I repeat again is a major fault, the calamity of Greece is the
30 Greek grandmothers forcing their grandchildren to eat. As a result I had developed an
31 excessive sensibility to that kind of behavior. The other day we were in a Franco-

1 American family in New York. The Greek Egyptian grandmother was there and she was
2 force-feeding a two-year-old grandchild. I took it for about five, ten minutes and then
3 exploded. I let her—

4 RV: What did you say?

5 JC: I said, I said, “What are you doing? You are criminal.” I said, “You force
6 feed—this boy will eat as much as he wants and he will not eat if he does not want to.” It
7 was like, oh, she started to complain. “No, I told you, you are absolutely, you are
8 behaving in a criminal way and it’s about time that doing so.” Fortunately her son was
9 there. Her daughter-in-law was not there, but her son also and he took my side. “Yes,
10 he’s right, he’s right. I keep telling you that.” I don’t know if she got very upset, I’m
11 hoping she did because if she got very upset maybe she will modify her behavior, but I
12 got upset. That’s why when we are in Greece we purposely avoid going to people’s
13 homes that have small children because either I’ll have to leave or I’ll have to explode
14 and let them have it, let them realize what a poor behavior they display with their
15 grandchildren.

16 RV: So you’re very passionate about this food issue?

17 JC: I’m very, very, very passionate. I have convictions about that. Greek
18 grandmothers are not my favorite sort.

19 RV: I assume this was your mother’s mother, your maternal grandmother?

20 JC: Yes, yes, right, a delightful woman. I have the fondest memories of her. In
21 her optimism there is always solution for—there was never a crisis for her. There was
22 never something to fret about and nothing—there was also—and there was always a
23 funny side to every story. Of course everybody people do at least smiling not to laugh
24 out loud.

25 RV: Why was she so different do you think?

26 JC: True nature, I would say, it’s natural. I don’t remember the composition of
27 her family. She probably was one of numerous children. She had seven daughters. She
28 had one son. She had seven daughters and five of them managed to come to the United
29 States because an aunt, I think a sister of hers of the mother, had come to the United
30 States. Now we are talking about late 1800s and early 1900s, very early. She had come
31 in the awareness that raising seven children in the little village was not going to be very

1 easy. She managed to take five of them. They all married and they prospered. She was
2 in Chicago. The daughters, one went to—two went to Chicago, one in South Bend,
3 Indiana, another one in Cincinnati and my mother ended up in Tulsa.

4 RV: Okay. Was she—did she remain optimistic during the German occupation?
5 Did she live that long?

6 JC: The grandmother.

7 RV: Yes.

8 JC: Yes, she lived that long. She died the years—unfortunately she died when
9 we were not there. I have a sorrowful regret that I wasn't there to be at her funeral, but
10 she died. She remained even during the occupation. There was nothing who could
11 undermine her lively spirit and optimistic view of the world and of her life.

12 RV: Sounds like an incredible woman.

13 JC: You're absolutely right. She was an incredible woman.

14 RV: Did your mother have similar characteristics?

15 JC: No, no. No. She was not exactly the opposite but no, well she was rather on
16 the pessimistic side, but very witty, responded to humor readily. She was demanding,
17 strong personality and very pretty, with blue eyes, very pretty woman.

18 RV: What did she do for a living? What was her job in Greece?

19 JC: No, she never worked.

20 RV: She did not work?

21 JC: She never worked. Eventually she divorced my father and she remarried a
22 Greek professor of physical education. She had a very happy life with him. Then finally
23 she declined, she died at the age of ninety-three, I think, yes, which means ninety-three,
24 she died in 1993. She was born in 1900. She kept her spirits up to the last few months.
25 She's gone. A few days later my latest granddaughter was born, so one came to replace
26 the other.

27 RV: Yes, sir.

28 JC: Yes.

29 RV: Did she remain the rest of her life in Greece? Did she live in Greece
30 permanently?

1 JC: No, she came back. She came back in '46, '47, as a matter of fact. I must
2 pay tribute because it was thanks to her coming back to New York, she worked there in a
3 gift shop. As a result she kept me in school. She kept the both of us in school as a matter
4 of fact. We were both—I quit the Chicago University. Then I came to Columbia
5 University where I got my masters degree in sociology. My brother got his masters
6 degree in chemistry, but literally, we worked of course like every other university student
7 to supplement the income, but the basic income that kept us going was my mother's
8 salary from the gift shop. Then she went back in '51 and remarried in '51. It was the year
9 that I was married myself.

10 RV: You got married the same year?

11 JC: The same year, got married the same year. Interesting enough I met my wife
12 through the gift shop.

13 RV: Oh, really?

14 JC: Yes. When all this fall together, but another girl that worked at the gift shop
15 was an Italian American girl who was an opera singer and finally made it to the
16 Metropolitan. She wanted to put some Greek songs in her repertoire, but she didn't speak
17 Greek. So my mother had the brilliant idea to propose that I coach her to pronounce and
18 learn the Greek songs by heart. Also which we did, but she happened to have a
19 girlfriend, a roommate from Columbia. She suggested that I meet here. At that time
20 there was an annual dinner for the Greek-American Chamber of Commerce of which I
21 was the secretary at the time. I invited Nancy, Nancy Fleischmann to come and the
22 romance started then.

23 RV: So your first date was at the Chamber of Commerce dinner?

24 JC: Right, exactly. We had—then we stayed together for, let's see this goes back
25 now to '49. '49 for a couple of years. Then I left for Morocco, we'll come to that and
26 once in Morocco and I left New York with the thought with well, it was a romantic
27 engagement. We were both happy, but even good things come to an end. So I left for
28 Morocco, but then I missed her and I proposed to her by letter.

29 RV: Did you really?

30 JC: Yes, a long letter. In a long letter I proposed to her and with a return mail
31 came a reply with piece of paper with the word yes. That's all there was.

1 RV: That's it, just one word. What was your reaction?

2 JC: Yes. My reaction was so mixed, it was mixed, it was mixed. I would have
3 expected a little bit more flowers around the yes, but then I realized that the note was the
4 promptest and the clearest way of agreeing. So then she got as a wedding present the
5 passage from her parents to Casa Blanca. She came, we got married in Casa Blanca.

6 RV: How romantic.

7 JC: It was. It was. It was the first American marriage there since the war. As a
8 result the local authorities the newspaper took it as a major event. We had the
9 photographer for the New France newspaper to take pictures of which we all have. They
10 are professional good pictures. They published a couple of them in the front page of the
11 newspapers. So we became celebrities for a few days at least. So that you going back,
12 thanks to the gift shop. So the gift shop not only kept us in school, but provided me with
13 a wife.

14 RV: It sounds like a very good gift shop, provided good gifts.

15 JC: Right it was on Broadway, on Broadway and 112th.

16 RV: Now have you been back to New York and seen the gift shop? Is it still
17 there?

18 JC: It's not. It's not there any more.

19 RV: Okay. Have you ever visited back to the neighborhood?

20 JC: Oh, yes. Yes, we go often. Our house where we lived in our house we had a
21 room, an apartment house with the keys and privileges, difficult days, but yes, yes we
22 have been there. She stayed in the Parnassus Club which is on 114th and Broadway. So
23 that's what brings us up to, up to Columbia.

24 RV: Do you mind if we go back a little bit?

25 JC: Let's go back a little bit.

26 RV: Tell me about what your memories of school is in Greece. What were your
27 favorite subjects? What did you enjoy studying and what kind of student were you?

28 JC: I was a fairly good student. I was among the top of three, four, I would say,
29 three, four. In high school I was constantly competing with one fellow for first place who
30 interestingly enough became the head of the telecommunications company of Greece,
31 which is a senior post, important post. He became the head of it, but he, he was more

1 methodical, more studious, more—but fairly humorless person whereas I was a little bit
2 more relaxed about it, but we competed as I said. So I remember this, this is in high
3 school which is, high school was in Sparta, which is the capital of the county of the
4 department, but it's the famous Sparta, of which nothing is left of the ancient Sparta, very
5 little. Some ruins, stones, not even ruins, stones of an ancient theater, but really the
6 Spartans, they didn't leave anything behind. Actually they were not given to creating
7 monuments where the Athenians distinguished themselves in that respect. So, but that
8 was a happy life, no, a happy life. There I met—that is something that's good to recall it,
9 I have never spoken about it—a journalist, slightly older than we were. We were a group
10 of five, six people, students.

11 RV: This is during high school?

12 JC: This is high school. Somehow we formed a group of friends. We saw each
13 other every day, after school, during school. Somehow I don't remember we got to know
14 this journalist who was a very interesting person, very interesting person, good writer,
15 very intellectually curious, always with a book in his hand. I think all of us benefited
16 from his house. As they say, you are being educated where you become what you
17 become through your peers. When I read that book, it was about three years ago, several
18 years ago, about all the peers, peers playing the dominant role in the development of a
19 young man. I immediately went to that period of time and I saw confirmation of that,
20 yes. I think nothing that parents, no siblings, nothing else matters as much as peers.

21 RV: What did this gentleman do for you? He's exposed you to different writings.

22 JC: No, he developed intellectual curiosity. We started learning German, so just
23 the rudimental. He raised the level of all discussions for the politics. He generally just
24 raised the level. There's more than the nonsense that the youngsters are engaged in, and
25 are wasting their time.

26 RV: This is before the German occupation?

27 JC: This was before the German, but it continued during the—only it was before
28 the German occupation because I left—I was in Athens at the time. Unfortunately he was
29 executed as a hostage, as a hostage during the occupation.

30 RV: No.

1 JC: He and twenty-nine other people, Spartan, including German speaking,
2 German educated doctors and lawyers. They were an asset to Germany. They rounded
3 up and they executed them. There's the man.

4 RV: Why?

5 JC: Hostages. They were some—the guerillas, the Communist guerillas did
6 something and in revenge, in an effort to prevent from this becoming the rule they picked
7 up the thirty people and drove them about fifteen miles from Sparta and executed them in
8 a place. Now there is a memorial to them.

9 RV: When did you find out about this?

10 JC: Oh shortly after, shortly.

11 RV: How did you feel?

12 JC: Oh, terrible, terrible, terrible. It was, because very, very badly, very badly.
13 But at the time under the circumstances I mean one became a little bit callous, a little bit
14 cynical, but I was shaken. I was shaken that that dear friend had gone that way. So,
15 that's what.

16 RV: What were your favorites subjects in high school?

17 JC: Oh, the favorite, in favorite subjects good. I think I was pretty good in
18 languages and Greek. To this day, I think I write better Greek than ninety percent of the
19 Greek university students.

20 RV: Really?

21 JC: Yes. Even today, which it surprises me, but I remember we had a very good
22 professor of Greek who convinced me that there was more to it. As a result it helped me
23 with other languages as well because I got the spirit of grammar and of syntax so well in
24 Greek that I immediately had the keys to go into the syntax and grammar of other
25 languages.

26 RV: So it came natural to you?

27 JC: It came natural, exactly. Really, really I want this and unfortunately with my
28 wife who has not had the same experience with grammar and syntax she is unable on one
29 hand to impress her with my ability to get into the grammar of other languages, but at the
30 same time cause her frustration for not being to able to do like this because English
31 grammar does not teach you grammar the way other languages do. Greek being one,

1 German being another, to say nothing about Russian. But then the French and the Italian
2 grammar is not the same, does not have the same rigor and the same complexity, or
3 structure. The syntax of course is complex enough, but the grammar as such is
4 completely different in the Greek, German, Russian languages.

5 RV: What languages do you speak today?

6 JC: Today French, English and Greek. I spoke at one time Arabic. Of course I
7 went to the Arabic school. I was pretty good. I was able to conduct business, diplomatic
8 business in Arabic. I was pretty good in German too, but I probably have lost most of it,
9 but if I were to find myself in an environment for two, three, four months of German
10 speaking or Arabic speaking it would come back to me. But right now, I can write, oh,
11 three languages, which impresses my grandchildren that I can have a number of cards in a
12 suite from Greek to French to English to Greek to write the French cards and long letters.
13 All right, three languages is enough if you can use them competently.

14 RV: Yes, sir. Did you participate in sports as a child and in high school?

15 JC: Oh, yes, very true, but then again in Greece the sports aren't—but we of
16 course played soccer, football, but other than that there was not much opportunity. It was
17 later, much later that I picked up tennis. Thanks to my children I learned to swim well,
18 which comes now handy because we have the house in Greece. We swim twice a day for
19 five months. So that, but I was always in sport. I found out in Saigon that I could
20 outplay even the ball boys. They would change every twenty minutes or so. I would
21 continue and in one afternoon played at noon.

22 RV: At tennis.

23 JC: In tennis. We played at noon because the courts are available and all this. So
24 we played at noon in the Saigon summer, hot climate. The ball boys would not keep up
25 with me and go chase. So I would play with two, three hours, four or five ball boys.

26 RV: It sounds like you were a natural athlete.

27 JC: Yes, I would say, but I say I wouldn't haven't won any medals but I'm
28 basically I have. The basic characteristic is, which still survives is that I am like the
29 Vietnamese. I don't know what fatigue is. Were you there when I tell the story?

30 RV: No, sir.

1 JC: Well, okay we might as well tell it. People when they hear that we have
2 served in so many places attempted to ask the natural question, which did you like best. I
3 try to explain that we were very happy in every one of them because the condition of the
4 country, the circumstance under which we went, the family situation, all these were
5 factors that made to have happy memories from all of them. But if they insist, no the
6 game is that you come up with a country. We'll say Vietnam and of course immediately
7 is why. So, because of the people, good people, alert, quick, humorous, and don't know
8 fatigue. Vietnamese don't know fatigue. When my friends, especially the farmers in
9 Greece complained that they're tired, they're worked today, all day and so what. I
10 usually said, "Don't talk to me because I have seen the Vietnamese. For you, you played
11 all day. You go to Vietnam and see how long, how hard they work and then you will
12 learn. You will have the right to speak of this," but I don't know fatigue which is unfair
13 because I'm unfair with my family, at times, although less with my family, but more with
14 my friends because we do something. Within an hour or so they say, "Oh, we must
15 stop." I say, "Why stop? There is no reason to stop." "Well, I don't really"—"What's
16 wrong with you? You've got to continue. We're going to continue to do this." So, but
17 that's—even today I think I find myself not prone to tire very easily or not at all. I
18 always like to go on and on and on.

19 RV: Do you think the fact, what you said, the Vietnamese don't know fatigue, do
20 you think that played a role in the war against the French and the Americans?

21 JC: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. Because their heart was in it, they
22 could go on and on without food and with nothing else, but with the ARVN (Army of the
23 Republic of Vietnam) because their heart was not in it they were fatiguing, yes.

24 RV: Okay, okay. We'll talk more about that later when we get to that. Tell me
25 what you did after high school, when you graduated high school.

26 JC: This is Sparta. We went to Athens and I enrolled in the law school and
27 started law school. Now, that's an interesting period too because there again peers. The
28 thing is do you select the peers or your natural inclination brings you to that group of
29 peers. I have no answer to that.

30 RV: Or do they select you?

1 JC: Yes, but how each one selects is—so here we ended up a group of about
2 what, about two, four, six, seven, eight, seven, no eight. Again peers, we were of the
3 same interest and all of us raised the level. All of us were in the law school so we had the
4 same subjects. Often we would study together. One of them became a well-known
5 lawyer, unfortunately dead now. The other one became a professional for the university
6 in Athens. Two of them were executed by the Germans, again hostages. The third one is
7 Cornelius Castoriadis. Does that mean anything to you? No.

8 RV: No, sir.

9 JC: No. So you are not in philosophy. If you were in philosophy, I assume. He
10 was up at the—he died about five years ago, perhaps the greatest living philosopher and
11 he will remain a major figure in philosophy. He moved—he left Greece right after law
12 school and he moved to France. He became French citizen. He wrote several books, but
13 a major, major—and what is more important, he was a Trotskyite. So leader of the
14 Trotskyite group. Once he broke with the Trotskyites and then he became the editor and
15 practically wrote the whole magazine, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. It's an important
16 publication, which lasted about ten years. Important publication in the history of French
17 left politics, sociable. The eighth one is Andreas Papandreou?

18 RV: Really?

19 JC: Yes.

20 RV: Wow, interesting. This is quite a group of people.

21 JC: Quite a group of people, right. The other one became American ambassador.
22 So, no Andreas Papandreou, he was in the same group. I mean we were together
23 practically all day long and late in the night. We all lived in Athens, so it was short
24 distances. So we have, I think what was it, oh fond memories of Andreas, but he was
25 egotistical as he proved to be as prime minister, selfish, utterly selfish, ambitious, which
26 is—but ambitious, ready to step on his mother's coffin if it was helpful, that kind of
27 ambition. It was not ambition to do well but to succeed. Ambitious and very Greek in not
28 the best sense of the word.

29 RV: What do you mean?

30 JC: Yes, what do I mean? Given to corruption, given to getting something for
31 nothing, given to duplicity, given to unfairness, disloyalty. It's an awful lot isn't it.

1 RV: Yes sir.

2 JC: Awful lot, but the right he had charismatic, he was a charismatic figure, good
3 orator, perhaps not as good as his father who was also prime minister in his days, not as
4 good as his father but a good orator. But at the same time unprincipled in his oratory, but
5 effective all right and that's why he managed to win elections and to stay oh about eight,
6 ten years.

7 RV: How much contact did you have with him as prime minister?

8 JC: That's the thing. He proved himself disloyal to all his friends.

9 RV: Really?

10 JC: Yes. Because we knew him well and he did not want us to be looking in his
11 eye and knowing what we're thinking of him. That's exactly why he always. The last
12 time I saw him was in the spring of '81, in the spring of '81. We had lunch together with
13 my wife Nancy and we talked about things. He was relaxed. He was all right, warm,
14 recalled a few of the old days, but we talked more current politics. It was the time when
15 the presidential elections were in France. As a matter of fact it was some weeks later. So
16 he said if Mitterrand wins, I think I'll win too. He was proven right. Mitterrand won and
17 he won too. But they were both of the same kind. Mitterrand had all these characteristics
18 that I mentioned about Andreas Papandreou, but what's more interesting perhaps is that I
19 saw him again in the United States, in the United States because he left during the
20 occupation. No not during occupation where the German were. Yes he left during the
21 occupation. During university, he came to the United States and he put himself through
22 Harvard, but actually his first wife put him through Harvard. His first wife was a Greek-
23 American girl from Queens, Christina, a remarkable woman. I think I can say, perhaps
24 the most remarkable woman I have met in my life.

25 RV: Really?

26 JC: Yes.

27 RV: What made her so?

28 JC: What made her so? Intelligence of course, smart girl because she became a
29 doctor after she put Andreas through school, then she put herself through medical school.
30 She became a doctor. She then, they were divorced and then she moved to Denver,
31 married another doctor. We'll come perhaps to that. So anyway she was a remarkable

1 woman, warm, intelligent, not terribly attractive, but she radiated goodness and spirit and
2 generosity and grace. So, we met her. Then I went to Boston with a girlfriend and stayed
3 with Andreas and Christina.

4 RV: What year was this approximately?

5 JC: This is '47, '47, yes. 1947. As I said he—and I needed something from
6 Columbia University. By that time he was professor of economics at Harvard. He did
7 well academically. He would have become—he could even conceivably win Nobel
8 Prize. He was brilliant, brilliant scholar, brilliant, brilliant scholar. Then he moved to
9 Minnesota. His wife continued her studies in medicine. One day he phoned to her and
10 he says, “We are through.”

11 RV: Just out of the blue?

12 JC: Out of the blue, out of the blue. He had met a student of his, Margarita of
13 Bulgarian descent. He fell in love apparently. He married her and then she became the
14 second Mrs. Papandreou. She stayed with him until, oh for several years. Yes there was
15 a question about the children because she was not ready for children and he wanted
16 children. There was that question, but out of the blue. After that he moved to California
17 where he became head of the department of economics at Berkley at UCLA (University
18 of California at Los Angeles). He wrote several articles. I don't think he has written a
19 book, but several articles and then Karamanlis, the prime minister at the time of Greece,
20 knew of him and he called him to Greece to be his advisor. He went not with the
21 prospect of staying, but once he was there he stayed and he went into politics and he
22 became prime minister and a great figure. I don't think he was the best that could have
23 happened to Greece but he, and as I said he never really saw—I made an attempt to see
24 him and I called his secretary in the office. There was always some excuse. I heard from
25 the other friends too that they had made an effort to see him. Those that were in Greece
26 of course they offered to help him, to do things for him, to work with him and then
27 always ignored. I repeat because he knew when they looked in his eyes he knew what
28 they were thinking of him and what he was doing.

29 RV: Did you keep in touch with your other friends?

30 JC: Yes. We kept in touch with the others, yes, also yes with Castoriadis in
31 France, with the other lawyer, he died unfortunately as I said and another one, another

1 one, the professor yes. We have kept in—Nancy got to meet most all of them except for
2 those that were executed. One was executed by the Germans, the other one was executed
3 by the Greek government during the civil war. So he was communist. I mean he was
4 card-carrying communist, I'm pretty sure. By the way Papandreou was Trotskyite. Yes,
5 he was Trotskyite and active, militant.

6 RV: During his time at law school or after?

7 JC: During the time he was in school, during the time he was in law school.
8 Some people claimed that he remained and some people claimed that he retained some
9 contacts with some well-known Trotskyites, one of them who made a name for himself in
10 Nigeria with the movement of the *autogestión*, the self-management. I got to know him
11 too in those years and so forth. There might be some truth to that, there might be,
12 because he was so thoroughly convinced that about Trotskyite, the fourth international
13 and Marxist and some of the things he did in Greece were Marxist inspired, but there is
14 no proof. People alleged that even the 1818, October twenty-eighth, or probably eighteen
15 October, seventeen October movement, terrorist movement that survived for twenty-
16 seven years and only last year they caught them. The trial is going on now, allowed to
17 continue their terrorist activities because Papandreou covered them. That's perhaps
18 excessive, but there is something to suspect of why.

19 RV: You think this?

20 JC: Yes, and why the Greek police that's quite effective and they have their
21 informers were not able to penetrate and put an end to that organization remains a
22 mystery that will probably be resolved by some historian some day. But Papandreou did
23 the other thing too. He destroyed all the archives of the Greek archives and all political
24 activities during of the war for the civil, which were a treasure for somebody like you in
25 the Vietnam Center knows what a loss that can be. So he persisted and I think part of it
26 was because he wanted to destroy the record on his involvement, on his—because
27 subsequently he wrote books that when he was arrested, yes I did mention this, that
28 finally he was on because of foolishness. So he kept the names on a book of the people
29 that had contributed to his Trotskyite cause.

30 RV: Hmm, okay.

1 JC: Right. So as a result, the whole group of us found ourselves in the hands of
2 the Metaxas dictatorship. Now he claims he wrote that book that he fought, he came to
3 blows with the officer that tried to interrogate him and so forth. Nonsense I said. The
4 trick that the—which was a pretty clever one—that the Metaxas police used required the
5 prisoners to sign an allegiance, renounce communism or Trotskyism, whatever they are
6 now, renounce and sign an allegiance to the Greek Republic. He signed it. A friend of
7 mine sent it to me about four or five months ago and I said send to me the whole text of
8 his declaration. It was published in the newspapers and it was published—it was
9 published in a magazine. Oh I don't know what magazine, quite influential magazine
10 published by the brother of another Trotskyite who was the head of the extreme left in the
11 political scene of Greece, but legitimate owner, not the high ground. So it was published
12 in that magazine, see who were—the same group, yes it was the same group.

13 RV: Right. Why would an anti-Trotskyite or you know a supposed confessional
14 of anti-communism or anti-Marxism and then get published in a Marxist or leftist
15 magazine?

16 JC: It's not Marxist magazine. No, no this—

17 RV: Just extreme left.

18 JC: No, it's a mainstream publication. No, it's a mainstream.

19 RV: Oh, okay I misunderstood. What were your political leanings in law school?

20 JC: Left, left, but never Marxist or Trotskyite. I had admiration for Trotsky more
21 as a literary writer because he was a gifted—it's too bad that he did not write. He would
22 have been definitely a Nobel Prize Winner. I mean his writings are just marvels of
23 literature, marvels of it, even in the.

24 RV: All of it?

25 JC: All of it, all of it, I would say myself, but he's too—

26 RV: Do you have a favorite?

27 JC: My favorite. Yes, it's a small article that he wrote, Céline.

28 RV: Céline?

29 JC: Céline. So the French writer who actually became a collaborator with Fascist
30 leanings *To the End of the Night* is that—*To the End of*—the translation of his basic book
31 *To the End of the Night*, I believe, Céline. Trotsky wrote it, a dithyrambic review of the

1 literature of the style, and the talent of Céline, despite his Fascist leanings. It is true what
2 he wrote that the fascist leanings did not come up. He wrote it, yes, but nevertheless it's
3 a marvelous piece of writing. It's a short piece, but it shows the talent and the force of,
4 you know, and I bet you in Russian it must be even more powerful. To say nothing of
5 orator, he was the orator. He even exceeded even Lenin. But anyway, so I had
6 admiration for his literary talents.

7 RV: Okay. Why not Marxism for you?

8 JC: I thought that it did not allow room for the role of the individual, just the
9 class. It was too constraining. It had a constraining history, history even in the longest
10 perspective possible always, it has room for the role of the individual.

11 RV: Leaves out the human being?

12 JC: Pardon me.

13 RV: Leaves out the human.

14 JC: The human dimension, the human contribution, the human creativity, the
15 human autonomy, yes. (Inaudible) So the feeling is that in fact negates the human
16 autonomy, this whole condition upon economic conditions. So that did not appeal to me
17 at all.

18 RV: I think that's the classic criticism of Marxism.

19 JC: That's the classic—but I felt it more instinctively than anything else. So here
20 we are. So how are we doing?

21 RV: We're doing fine. How about we take a break for a moment?

22 RV: Okay. Why don't we go ahead with law school?

23 JC: Right, law school. There were two professors in university, one—.

24 RV: I'm sorry. Go ahead, now.

25 JC: Yes. There were two professors at the University of Athens, one of
26 sociology and the other one of civil law. They taught, but also they held seminars and all
27 of us in our group participated in their seminars. What must be recalled now is that I
28 mentioned Castoriadis, the philosopher. His best philosophy was expressed in those
29 seminars.

30 RV: Really?

1 JC: Yes. So, since then there was nothing new, he elaborated, he expanded, but
2 the basic tenets of his approach to the world of ideas is of course exactly there at that
3 seminar as a student, as a student.

4 RV: Interesting. What was said in the seminars?

5 JC: Well, it will be too complicated and perhaps require a little bit more thinking
6 for me to summarize, but basically very critical of Hegel and Marx on the philosophical,
7 not on the economic, on the philosophical. Again emphasizing, allowing for the role, for
8 the human creativity in the shaping of history. There was a basic thing. He, there, with
9 the help of the professors the vicious circle that if there is a class struggle, a class
10 struggle, how could it be that that class struggle can come to an end. There will always
11 be groups of people who would be formed and united on the basis of their various
12 interests. To claim that one class will prevail and it will bring the end of the class
13 struggle is an absurdity. That he developed, but that was—and then one of those
14 professors became president of the Republic of Greece. The other professor became
15 prime minister on several occasions and a major figure for Greek politics.

16 RV: It sounds like you got uber exposed to such interesting people in school and
17 such bright minds and original thinkers.

18 JC: Original thinkers, correct. That's true. No there was quite a bit of luck there.

19 RV: How much of that influence, looking back, did that have on you?

20 JC: I think I was influenced entirely, exactly. Both in the realm of ideas and in
21 the style of presenting them or for handling them or for communicating them, I think
22 that's—it's not only influence in terms of ideas but influence in a style of intellectual life,
23 yes.

24 RV: Right. You've carried this with you the rest of your life?

25 JC: The rest of the life, absolutely, absolutely, yes. One of the professors that
26 was a very effective orator too and I have heard him several times and have even been
27 moved by his oratory several times. So that was analysis enough. Where do we go from
28 now?

29 RV: How long were you there in law school, was it three years?

30 JC: Four years.

31 RV: Four-year program.

1 JC: Four-year program.

2 RV: Now, how did your mother feel about you being in law school? Was she
3 supportive of you?

4 JC: Oh yes, yes. No, no it was exactly right. My brother was in chemistry. He
5 had a good career. He became head of the department of Chemistry in the New York
6 University, Queens College. He remained there until retirement, ten, twelve, fourteen
7 years, head of the department. Every time he mentioned leaving and returning to
8 teaching they objected. They kept him going there. So he had—he did well by his
9 chemistry.

10 RV: Is he still alive?

11 JC: He's still alive, still alive.

12 RV: Is he living in Greece?

13 JC: No.

14 RV: Is he in New York?

15 JC: Lives in New York. He, I don't—yes, he came on occasional visits to Greece
16 a long time ago, but he hasn't been back for the last twenty years.

17 RV: Now, if I may ask, do you visit each other, or do you visit?

18 JC: No. Our relations are strained. Our relation is strained. Well, its all right.
19 He has characteristics that do not appeal to either me or to Nancy.

20 RV: You don't need to elaborate.

21 JC: I don't need to.

22 RV: You do not need to. So after you graduate from law school, what did you
23 want to do? What were your plans?

24 JC: Well, no the graduation from school happened at the same time as the end of
25 the war. Immediately our preoccupation was to return to the United States. Yes, there
26 was no idea of doing something in Greece.

27 RV: Let's talk about the German occupation then.

28 JC: All right, yes.

29 RV: What are your—when you think back about this in your mind, what do you
30 see? What do you feel?

1 JC: I see un-called for ruthlessness, cruelty, rigidity, discipline of course, and
2 arrogance. That was visible. That was absolutely palpable. Of course the—it turned
3 out and there has been a book written by an English historian that Greece suffered the
4 most of all occupied Europe partly because there was a vengeance of the part of the
5 Germans because of the resistance of the Greeks in Albania that delayed the descent of
6 Germany. They also made it necessary for the Germans to come because then the
7 original strategy was for Italy to come through Benuri and occupy Greece and therefore
8 free German troops to go to the eastern front to prepare for the eastern front. But the
9 resistance and the defeat of the Italians by the Greeks made necessary for the Germans to
10 invest, to divert considerable forces to conquer Greece. So there was that basic element
11 at the headquarters up there, did not forgive the Greeks for doing that. The second, they
12 wanted to break the spirit of the Greeks through hard conditions, starvation if necessary
13 so as not to resist and to allow for the Greeks, for the Germans to use the strategic
14 position of Greece for other operations. So for both the reasons of the—unfortunately I
15 have not read the book. My wife did read it and made me read a few excerpts, but the
16 point is made convincingly that Greece suffered the most of all occupied Europe. As I
17 said at the beginning, not a day would go by without corpses of people having died
18 during the night out of starvation.

19 RV: You would see them on the streets?

20 JC: You see them on streets. You see them on street corners. I would see them
21 also, oh ten, twelve, fourteen, fifteen a day.

22 RV: In Athens?

23 JC: In Athens, in Athens. So, but fortunately again, good luck, partly because of
24 American citizenship I was hired by the International Red Cross that was allowed by the
25 Germans to distribute food to Greece to prevent total starvation.

26 RV: So you saw it first hand?

27 JC: Yes, of course, first hand. If it wasn't for the International Red Cross,
28 probably the population of Greece would have been cut in half because the starvation was
29 absolutely—you could see, but the thin people walking around hardly making it. So the
30 International Red Cross saved hundreds of thousands of Greeks. Also there were ration
31 books of course. So I was employed—also it was headed by an admiral there. Of course

1 being employed we had our rations also which helped out, helped, considerably helped
2 for us to survive. So there was another happy occasion, perhaps the American citizenship
3 gave a little bit more color to the International Red Cross and I was hired.

4 RV: How did your family survive, your mother and your brother during the
5 occupation?

6 JC: Through that, also. It is true that occasionally we receive things from the
7 village, but that became rarer and rarer. We survived through the International Red
8 Cross. Frankly I don't know how we would have done otherwise. I really loved that you
9 asked me that question. I don't think, we might not even have survived unless we got up
10 and left in a way because the villages managed. So there was always a chicken to raise
11 eggs and a pig and such. So another dreadful experience was when the Germans had the
12 occupation had the information that there were resistance militants in some
13 neighborhood, the block. They circled the neighborhood and asked all the males to come
14 out, so get then the informers who will identify them. So went through that experience
15 two or three times. It was dreadful because you never know whether the informer or his
16 buddies can point to you.

17 RV: So you had to stand out on the street.

18 JC: You had to stand out also in the sun lined up. I was talking about four or
19 five hundred people, standing, all of them trying to avoid looking at the informer.

20 RV: Was a German officer with him, and just walking?

21 JC: Yes, right. A German officer with him and they engaged in this sort of thing.
22 I mean I don't know how we would find it, or find, but soldiers capable of atrocities, no
23 matter what nationality really.

24 RV: How did you feel when was this was happening?

25 JC: I felt terrified. Although you kept your cool, you didn't do anything about it,
26 you waited until the whole thing—the whole thing would last a couple of hours. Then
27 there was people pointing, the informer would point to one or two or three and then take
28 them behind the wall and you hear them screaming, terrible, terrible. Hear them
29 screaming because they were trying to get information on the spot to see if he can point
30 out somebody else, terrible, terrible, terrible, terrible.

31 RV: Did you harbor resentment towards the Germans for—

1 JC: Pardon me.

2 RV: Did you harbor any resentment toward the Germans after—?

3 JC: No, no. I have judgments, but I would have had the same judgments about
4 the Germans even if I had not gone, no. The experience does not—I would have thought
5 that they are rigid, that they are too disciplined, but as the saying goes, now some of our
6 friends in Greece, the foreign community in Greece, some of our best friends are
7 Germans. So because they are not all the same and they probably share the same
8 judgment about their own, but no, it was terrible to see that behavior, but any army would
9 have done the same thing. Once you engaged in this sort of effort to step on the
10 resistance and to prevent it or to undermine, you are capable of doing anything.

11 RV: Do you think its similar to what Ngo Dinh Diem did trying to retain power
12 in Saigon in the late '50s before he was assassinated? Do you think there was any
13 similarity?

14 JC: Similarity, yes. Probably yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I think I can see—that's
15 right. I can see—I haven't seen it, but now that you mention that probably happened,
16 villages rounded up, lining up and on the basis of informers or other means identifying
17 those that were suspected of Viet Cong and probably in that case shot on the spot. I think
18 it probably happened and happened very often, indeed it did. You did well to call my
19 attention to the parallelism there. Undoubted the same system and there's no other
20 system. You don't go to every house and say, "Who lives here?" and have the informer
21 go in, is it one of them, no, call them out.

22 RV: It's a public thing.

23 JC: Exactly. You've got to do it in the most expeditious way possible.

24 RV: Public pressure is all. Did you have to fly the Nazi flag at all or put a picture
25 of Hitler up in your—?

26 JC: No.

27 RV: Nothing like that?

28 JC: No, nothing like that. No, from that point of view they didn't go that far.
29 They did not go that far, no. I think the atrocities against the Jews and the other
30 minorities is the major crime of Nazism. The behavior against the resistance, the hostage
31 taking I think was more foolish, more foolish than cruel because it was not producing any

1 result. The guerillas, communists as they were, good, they're shooting the bourgeoisie.
2 They're shooting the bourgeoisie, so much the better than fewer people for us to shoot.
3 So it was very ill advice and then again they were shooting German-educated
4 professionals, absolutely stupid.

5 RV: It doesn't make sense.

6 JC: It didn't make sense at all, whoever it was. The officer who ordered that,
7 then he carried it out should be shot himself for stupidity not for anything else, for anti-
8 German behavior.

9 RV: What do you remember about your work with the Red Cross? Were these
10 Greek members of the International Red Cross or were they German?

11 JC: Yes, sure. No, no German. They were all Greek employees. So this is
12 understaffed and all this. They were under considerable pressure to make sure that ration
13 books were given to a living individual. The Germans were very preoccupied that rations
14 were not being used. There was no abuse what we would say in normal times, abuse of
15 the ration books. That's where some of us as employees had difficulty because we had to
16 detect efforts at abuse in issuing the bulletin, so require proof of existence and so forth.

17 RV: Now did you actually find abuse?

18 JC: I did not. I did not. I was inclined to close my eyes, which I did a few years
19 later, not very many years later, two, three years, when I was employed in the
20 unemployment office in New York, the unemployment office where the effort is again to
21 detect abuse of unemployment. So we had to receive all the holders of the card in order
22 to make sure that they have looked for a job during the preceding week. They were there
23 and always ready and willing. Oh, I know it. I thought it was a charade and also, but as a
24 result of my ignoring of this kind of agitators of this absurdity I got the reputation in the
25 office as being quick and efficient and productive. So every time—no it was—I am
26 amused every time I think of it. Every time the line would get longer at some other desk,
27 they called me to take the line and bring the other fellow to my line.

28 RV: So bring the John? (Both laugh)

29 JC: In no time at all—and I'm surprised that nobody suspected what I was doing.
30 They thought it was expeditious handling and quick action. I said, well some of it was

1 that too, but the other thing was my readiness even if I saw signs of abuse to ignore it and
2 to close my eyes.

3 RV: Okay. Why don't we take a break now?

4 RV: Okay. Let's continue sir. Now, when you graduated from law school, you
5 said you were determined and there was no question you were going to go back to the
6 United States.

7 JC: None whatsoever.

8 RV: Why is that?

9 JC: Because we have lived in Greece as Americans and it was always the
10 prospect of coming back. The health of my mother might have delayed a decision and
11 caught in the Greek system. Then by the occupation in delay, but nevertheless as soon as
12 the diplomatic representation for America came to the United States we contacted the
13 consul general. They loaned us the money. They booked us. They sent us to New York
14 on the great Swedish ship Agrippe's Horn and with a lot of Greek Americans on it. Some
15 of them we stayed in contact. Some of them we lost, but nevertheless it was a delightful
16 crossing. We arrived and we came directly—no first to Chicago to see aunts and cousins
17 and then to Tulsa. We got a deferment from the Army because there was a conscription
18 at the time. We got it at once. I think we got it more through connections of my father
19 than anything else, but anyway the war was ended and they weren't recruiting any more.

20 RV: Is this the first time you had seen your father since—?

21 JC: In a number of years, twenty years or so. Then, oh, he gave us each about a
22 thousand dollars and he said, "You're on your own." We were going to Chicago. We
23 said, "We're going to Chicago," and I went directly to Chicago, but my brother went
24 directly to Columbia for chemistry. Then as I said before we worked during the time. It
25 was a pleasant time in Chicago, challenging also.

26 RV: This was 1946 or '47?

27 JC: Now, we're talking about '46.

28 RV: You were there, just to clarify, you were there to get your master's degree in
29 sociology?

30 JC: The master's degree in sociology. They accepted the law degree from
31 Athens as a bachelor's degree. We had no problem about that. So it was clearly a case of

1 working for a bachelor's degree. I made a lot of friends, certainly a lot. Some of them
2 survived a few years ,but one of the more unpleasant experiences then was when we
3 discovered, I don't know by chance or someone had the idea to look up the subject of one
4 lecture in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. To the surprise of all of us we found out that the
5 professor had delivered verbatim the article of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. We were of
6 two minds, to admire his capacity of memorization of the article or his laziness to come
7 up with something more original. We left at that because otherwise he was a man of
8 great reputation, very pleasant man, obviously a good sociologist, but he thought that we
9 didn't deserve anything more than a recitation of the pertinent article of the *Encyclopedia*
10 *Britannica*. He did it with the right intonation and the right fluctuation of tone of voice
11 interspersed with a few touches of humor. We were all very happy and all admired him.

12 RV: What prompted you all or somebody to look? Was it just by chance?

13 JC: It must have been an accident, must have been an accident that somebody had
14 the idea. Of course as always the case immediately the whole class knew about it.

15 RV: Did anyone say anything to him?

16 JC: No, never, never, partly because the man was so full of well-established,
17 enormous, reputation. Therefore there was no question of his capacity to deliver an
18 original lecture if he wanted to or if he thought we were worthy of it or if it was farther
19 challenging enough. So he resorted to that. We had the gain of having an article from
20 the *Encyclopedia Britannica* delivered in person by a great authority.

21 RV: Right. Now where did you live in Chicago? Did you live on campus?

22 JC: I lived on campus at the International House, in the International House, yes.

23 RV: What are your memories of that, living on campus in Chicago?

24 JC: Oh, very pleasant, except for one. I had brought with me a fresco painting by
25 a very well-known Greek painter who painted in Byzantine style and of great reputation.
26 By neglect I hung it across the radiator. This being fresco it chipped. I have given it, by
27 the way, I have given it to a restorer, a woman restorer in France twenty years ago and
28 she has not restored it yet.

29 RV: Why not?

30 JC: Exactly what I am always—and I should do something about it. She asked
31 me for five thousand dollars to restore it and this was twenty years ago. So she probably

1 will be tempted to renegotiate the price and I'll be tempted to say, give it back to me. So
2 that's about it. Then I decided that, my mother was coming back, she was already in
3 New York, brother was in New York, perhaps I should go there in New York. So I got
4 transferred, no problem, I got transferred my credits to Columbia and continued in
5 Columbia.

6 RV: In a degree in sociology?

7 JC: Yes, a degree of sociology of which I took. There I had two very well known
8 people, Thomas Merton, a great figure in sociology and Paul Lazarsfeld, the one who
9 introduced really, really, established the scientific basis of polling. He was an Austrian,
10 German or Austrian professor, but very colorful and very original in his thinking and
11 research. So it was a good match between Merton and Lazarsfeld. I benefited a great
12 deal of sociological analysis and quantification. Thomas Merton was the one who
13 introduced the significant other by referring to mothers with young children living in an
14 apartment house and complaining that there were no teenagers around to baby-sit. When
15 it was a research made in scientific(?), they discovered there were plenty of teenagers
16 around but of the wrong kind to be accepted as babysitters. So it was a significant other
17 that was missing and not the other.

18 RV: Hmm, interesting, interesting.

19 JC: Yes. He developed that into a major theory. Just that it's—the only thing is
20 the theory of the significant other. So when we're talking about other people you say
21 how significant and how acceptable are to us and not in absolute numbers.

22 RV: Why sociology for you?

23 JC: No reason. No, no reason. I was interested in social phenomena and the
24 evolution of society. I don't think I was cut out for law so I couldn't possibly continue
25 with law. I don't think I could have practiced.

26 RV: Why not?

27 JC: I developed a theory on that that I just didn't conceive of any other form of
28 income except in the form of salary. So there are lawyers who are salaried people right,
29 but we associate practicing of law as an independent profession therefore developing
30 sources of income other than a salary. Somehow I just—that's why I don't think I could
31 have possibly become a merchant or salesman because I don't know, it's perhaps the

1 security or perhaps the—I don't know what it is, but I have settled on that theory and
2 accepted it as a fact of life. So—

3 RV: How long were you at Columbia?

4 JC: One semester because it was a one semester so I was completed. I did my
5 thesis on the Coal Council of the nationalized industry in Britain. Yes, I had some British
6 friends there. They were friends in the British consul and I had sources over there. I put
7 it together and it was accepted. Then I got my degree.

8 RV: 1947?

9 JC: In 1947, yes. 1947. Then there was the question of looking for a job,
10 looking for a job, yes. There was the Hellenic-American Chamber of Commerce
11 organization that was just put together. The purposes were not very clear and somehow I
12 got to know the president who was a Wall Street banker, Greek origin. More or less he
13 liked me and he offered me job. I took it foolishly because I, as I said, but it was a
14 salaried job anyway so I took it. I stayed with them, I stayed with them for about, oh a
15 year, year and half. Then I decided that it was not a job with a future. It was
16 monotonous. I had to deal with some people that were not quite congenial. Although I
17 was by myself with a secretary but nevertheless so I quit the job. I went and worked for
18 oil, olive oil importing company.

19 RV: Did you really?

20 JC: Exactly.

21 RV: How did you get that job, from Wall Street to olive oil?

22 JC: He was member of the Chamber, the Greek-American Chamber of
23 Commerce. As a matter of fact I think I quit because he offered me the job. It was a
24 well-paying job. Then so I went to work with him and worked with him, what, five, six
25 months. Then he decided to mount a sales sort of campaign offering reduced prices for a
26 period of time. I drafted the letter and we ran it off. He had seen it of course, the
27 president. It was—and not having any experience I forgot or I neglected, I didn't think at
28 all of putting down in the letter that this is revocable, that the company retains the right to
29 increase the prices after the expiration date or was their expiration. Well, there must have
30 been an expiration date, but nevertheless I didn't spell out the right to adjust the prices or
31 to increase the price. So he was right. He didn't like that now. So the following day I

1 found a letter firing me with a five hundred dollar check. He was generous enough, with
2 a five hundred—he didn't have any obligation to give the five hundred, very generous.
3 That was fortunately the only time I got fired. It was traumatic, but I realized that he had
4 the right. I didn't particularly like the job anyway, but it was a bit traumatic. I didn't
5 think that that sort of thing could ever happen to me but it did happen, fortunately.

6 RV: Were you living at home with mother?

7 JC: Yes.

8 RV: And your brother?

9 JC: And the brother, and the brother, yes and the brother. Yes, I think he had one
10 job with Merck at some point, maybe by that time he had gone to Merck. So, then I was
11 unemployed. I registered for unemployment insurance and I was on the other side of the
12 counter. Then, here is the good luck begins now after there, which means that the best
13 thing that could ever happen to me—that's always the case, the silver lining, getting fired
14 from that place, as you see the sequence now. The best thing that could have happened
15 and although I was temporarily traumatized I soon recovered. So I saw a public notice I
16 think in the unemployment office that the Corps of Engineers was hiring people for
17 overseas jobs, but there was no specifics. It was—so I said, "That sounds like
18 (inaudible)." I thought I would go to the place where it was downtown someplace New
19 York. Well, I go and found my place. It was a big, big office down there. I go to find
20 the man there with the spectacles, mild-mannered, piercing eyes, well-combed, sitting in
21 front of the typewriter when I came there. He was typing. So he said, "Sit down." So
22 we started chatting and he said, "Good, you want to"—he chatted. He asked me a few
23 basic questions, not very many questions. He said, "Do you speak French?" I said,
24 "Yes." It was more or less true, but I knew that he wasn't going to be able to test me so I
25 said, well—"All right," he said, "We'll let you know in a couple of weeks." In a couple
26 of weeks, indeed they called me and they gave me the job, GS-5.

27 RV: Really?

28 JC: GS-5, clerk general, GS-5 clerk general, but they wouldn't tell me where the
29 job was.

30 RV: This is with the U.S. government?

1 JC: U.S. government, Corps of Engineers. Corps of Engineers. They had even at
2 that time clearance procedure, but it was not as complicated as it is now. But anyway
3 they ran the clearance. So I was confirmed. There I saw one of the men of the
4 executives of this of whom I had, I was going to see a lot. Also we had the crew haircut.
5 So I said crew haircut, I liked the idea. So I said, “Well, yeah I have a crew haircut.” So,
6 from 1947 now, ’47—no, this is longer than that. We bring it down to ’50, end of ’50.

7 RV: This is in 1950 when you started?

8 JC: End of ’50 and (inaudible). I cut my hair crew hair cut and I had it until, until
9 ’78.

10 RV: Really?

11 JC: Yes.

12 RV: Why did you keep it so long?

13 JC: Well, I liked the practicality of the thing. I don’t have to worry about, not to
14 worry about combing, not to worry about ruining, not to worry about this then. So I had
15 a pretty nice—so I still have pictures, ’78, more than—yes, ’78.

16 RV: Your wife approved?

17 JC: Oh, yes she approved. So I had it also, but I associated this because I just
18 saw him in the hall. So I liked his looks and I (inaudible) and also and also the same
19 man, the same man, when I got to know him a few days later. He told me that he never
20 wore a coat, overcoat. I said, “That’s a great idea.” I always find it cumbersome and
21 annoying to wear overcoat. From there on to today I never wear overcoat, since 1950.
22 My goodness, fifty-three years I have not worn overcoat.

23 RV: Despite the temperature?

24 JC: Snow, snow, rain, blizzard, any. As a matter of fact I don’t own one. I don’t
25 own nothing. So this is just personal thing. So nevertheless, so finally. So they notify
26 me about a week before, “We are leaving on such and such date.” It was March,
27 February. It was February ’51 now, February now. We are leaving for Morocco. So,
28 clear things and boarded the plane, the old propeller planes, with the buckets, the seats on
29 the side, but what do you call them then—bucket seats. About fifteen, twenty of us were
30 going to Morocco to build four major air bases and to spend five hundred million dollars.
31 That’s what the fifteen, twenty people was. I said we’re the first plane load. So we went

1 there. It was exciting time because major—shortly after the war and it was hush-hush of
2 course. Nobody talked about it because they were being built in anticipation of the
3 Russian Army overrunning Europe and to be there to wage the war from Morocco. So
4 the Corps of Engineers which was the district as they call them, the basic unit of the
5 Corps of Engineers, to this engineer. We had a very capable older colonel there. The
6 man who recruited me was the supply officer as they called him in the Corps of
7 Engineers, the head of the Supply Department. He came. We became very good friends
8 because he and his wife were the witnesses to our wedding in Morocco in Casa Blanca
9 when Nancy came. It was civil ceremony only and she didn't speak a word of French at
10 the time. So when the crucial question was posed by the civil servant to say yes, so I
11 nodded, "Say yes now." She said yes. To this day I don't know whether the marriage
12 was valid or not. It would stand the test of court if she wanted to challenge it, because
13 she did, she said yes to something that she didn't understand but nevertheless. So we had
14 a marvelous—she was privileged. She didn't have to do a thing. She arrived on
15 Thursday and the wedding was on Saturday. We had an official lunch that I had
16 organized some of the paperwork, everything, everything, and all lined up. So she came
17 and we went to the municipal consul for the ceremony. Then I organized a luncheon for
18 the office people, for selected office people by the beach. So all she had to do was to
19 follow. Then the officer threw a reception for us, a very generous reception because to
20 this day we have some of their gifts.

21 RV: Really?

22 JC: Exactly.

23 RV: Wow.

24 JC: Fifty-two years later.

25 RV: What are they? Do you remember?

26 JC: It was a casserole, pots, cooking pots, trays, dishes, silverware. To this day
27 we have—in Greece we have pots from that day. We have silver still. So then we left to
28 go to for the honeymoon to Seville. So we took the boat.

29 RV: How long had it been since you'd seen her, since you've come from New
30 York?

1 JC: Not very long really because I left in February and she came in August, so
2 only a few months really. Yes, that's right. Was that '50? That's right, yes, only a few
3 months. So, we had a good time in Seville. Seville was totally different from what it is
4 today. There were (inaudible) and rows of pot holes, but anyway, we had a great time.
5 We stayed in the Alfonso Tres XIII Hotel which has become now one of the luxury hotels
6 of the world. At the time it was affordable in a room that was four, five times the size of
7 this room. Good memories. Good memories. We walked Seville and we bought flowers
8 and we did all sorts of things. Then we returned to resume work as GS clerk five in
9 charge of the mail.

10 RV: That was your job?

11 JC: That's my job.

12 RV: Sorting the mail.

13 JC: Sorting the mail, and distributing it.

14 RV: Distributing it too?

15 JC: So, yes exactly. Unfortunately these at the age of thirty-one, too late to be
16 playing with sorting mail but.

17 RV: Sorting mail with a master's degree.

18 JC: Master's degree.

19 RV: Right, okay.

20 JC: Then there was a position in the piece of course they call it a labor officer.
21 Labor officer, this was a cost plus fee contract, if you know what that is.

22 RV: Go ahead and describe that.

23 JC: Cost plus fee is where the contractor who was building the bases, most of
24 them, they called him in. Of course he needed the basic sum contract for the own plus
25 costs, which includes labor. So it includes and it includes supply. So they're providing
26 the know-how, the management, the engineering talent and also—and the Corps of
27 Engineer say on top of that basic sum of the contract, the cost plus the percentage profit.
28 So controlling the costs, it was a major responsibility for the Corps of Engineer. So the
29 labor officer was controlling the wages, the wages of the contractor. The contractor in
30 order to increase the payroll, kept promoting, keeps promoting in place, finds ways to
31 promote him, to reassign here, to add duties, a lot of paperwork, but if done skillfully and

1 the contractors as I found out later were very skillful in that. So they could—without
2 padding the payroll, but increase the total amount of payroll. It was not fraud, but it was,
3 it almost legitimate manipulation of the work force, which benefited by increasing the
4 cost. So there was only—was this one empty. They recruited. There was someone in the
5 district. He came a little bit later. Then the workload became a little bit too much for
6 him so they decided to have an assistant labor officer. There I'm not so clear. I'm clear
7 for the rest of it, whether I put in a word that I would like to take, or some kind thought
8 soul took pity for me and my mailing business and thought of me. He proposed me and
9 of course I was appointed assistant labor officer. That lasted a few months. Then the
10 labor officer had a, literally, a nervous breakdown. He was a tense man, but a quiet man,
11 but nevertheless he had a breakdown. So he was medically evacuated and they recruited
12 a flamboyant replacement. He arrived with a white Cadillac, with a white Cadillac in
13 Casa Blanca. He liked the night clubs. So he lasted only a few months and then he was
14 given to understand that perhaps he would be better if he engaged in this sort of thing in
15 the United States. The position became vacant. There was talk in the district how to fill
16 the position and perhaps get from another unit in the United States and already a labor
17 officer. Then one day shortly thereafter I had an idea. I prepared on the proper form the
18 appointment of John P. Condon as labor officer for the district.

19 RV: You did not?

20 JC: Yes.

21 RV: You drew up your own appointment?

22 JC: Yes, exactly. Once I prepared the—once I hereby appointed the colonel had
23 the capacity, had the power to do that, to appoint a labor officer, hereby appoint John P.
24 Condon to all the form and didn't notice the senior diplomatic office symbols. I sent it
25 up.

26 RV: Who signed it?

27 JC: Nobody signed it, nobody signed it.

28 RV: Okay, just a memorandum.

29 JC: Simply a memorandum. Yes, that went from the legal office to whom the
30 labor officer reported as it was drafted from the legal office, yes exactly. It was from the
31 legal office. So I sent it out without presenting myself and argue the case. I just the put it

1 in the mail box, in the incoming mailbox to the lawyer. He was from Houston, Texas,
2 Paul Doppler. So I sent it to—I put it in the mailbox and see what happens, no work,
3 nothing. So he read it as he told me about it, “Yes of course. Why didn’t we think of it?
4 Why, of course.” He signed it immediately and put a note of himself. He sent it to
5 executive officer. He sent it to the colonel. He signed it and then the following morning
6 I was appointed labor officer.

7 RV: Taking advantage of an opportunity for yourself.

8 JC: Exactly. Instead of going and talking and pleading and arguing and forth,
9 enumerate, so I put it, it is on paper. If they wanted to do it, it’s up to them. If they don’t
10 want to do all they have to do is tear the paper and no explanation given.

11 RV: Did they ever know that you wrote it?

12 JC: I think they did. No, up they didn’t know it, but Doppler he did because
13 nobody would have put it—Doppler knew, but he didn’t really come in to say good job or
14 something like this. He did what needed to be done. He endorsed it and put a note and
15 sent it to the executive officer. Then I assumed the duties and must have done well. I
16 lasted almost four years. Yes, some things were working out right. In the meantime
17 Nancy became pregnant. We were very good friends with my recruiter and witnesses.
18 Then we had a visit—no, let’s see. Yes, then there was a visitor, the head of the
19 personnel of the head of the Air Force headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany. He came
20 for some business he came. Being in the personnel I was in the labor, we met, we
21 chatted. We probably did a thing or two office work together. He went back to
22 Germany. Within a week a telegram comes from the Air Force headquarters requesting
23 my transfer to the Air Force as a labor negotiator.

24 RV: For the Air Force?

25 JC: For the Air Force, for the Headquarters Air Force in Wiesbaden in Germany.
26 So crisis in the Corps of Engineers. They liked me they didn’t want me to go, but at the
27 same time they didn’t want to stand in my way of a career. So they said, “All right. If
28 John wants to go, who are we?”

29 RV: This is after four years?

30 JC: This is after four years, yes. This brings us to 1954, 1954. So one day we
31 packed the house. We went to the headquarters to Wiesbaden. Again by the time—so

1 there our two other children were born. The first born was the oldest girl was born in
2 Morocco. She was practically a few weeks old when we left Morocco to go. We got
3 there. We established a very good life, hard work, but there again I was put in charge of
4 all the labor problems of labor, management of labor in all these bases of the NATO
5 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Europe, except Germany because in Germany
6 there was somebody else who—so that meant France, England, Spain, Morocco, Turkey,
7 Greece. So I had—I was in charge of this. There are—to simplify matters I and another
8 colleague in Wiesbaden hit on the idea that instead of employing directly all those
9 thousands of local people that we should have an agency of the local government be the
10 legal employer, but in every other respect, we did the management, the assignment. We
11 worked them up. They did the pay rolling. We reimbursed their cost without any
12 additional cost we paid on it because in this way we were getting out of the risk of being
13 sued in local courts and sovereignty. Are we suitable? Are we—a bit complicated that
14 the Air Force had to call us and NATO didn't like and getting out. This is the majority of
15 the constraints of Congress who kept putting ceilings on local employees. Some of the
16 ceilings were unjustifiably low. So if they were employed, the legal employer was
17 somebody else, the ceilings were not in the local government, it did not apply to the other
18 government employees, what is needed.

19 RV: So there was a need for more personnel.

20 JC: It wasn't needed very much. I don't think it was a major thing. The first
21 reason was the primary reason but nonetheless that set up a new type of organization
22 system which I call the coordinating committee. Delegation from the host government
23 and I from the U.S. forces and we negotiated all that the cost and the management even,
24 details, leaves and holidays and increases, and overtime, all this immediate of things that
25 were negotiated in the negotiating committee. But where the beauty of the thing was that
26 we were Air Force, Navy and Army, before that coordinated committee which was my
27 concept, my invention. We had to coordinate by—we didn't have email at the time—by
28 mail, by mail the positions. So I had to write—and the Air Force was in the driver's seat.
29 So I had to write to the Army and the Navy proposing an approach to the problem at
30 hand. They report back either accepting or modifying. So then I had to write to both of
31 them back and say whether their comments were acceptable, what could be done. Then

1 they had to come back and report. So sometimes it was a matter of several weeks to
2 exchange these. Now that's because there was the usually rivalry between us, even the
3 positional proposition that the Air Force was a correct one and acceptable, it was good to
4 have a reasonable objection. So, whether it was original, or the coordinate committee the
5 way I drafted the constitution and set it up decisions were made at the committee. So
6 they had the right to be represented but we were not withdrawing from the committee to
7 organize those. So I was making the decisions on the spot. Then I hit on the other idea
8 of preparing minutes countersigned by me and the counterpart, the French counterpart in
9 the case our English counterpart and become executive appointees. I didn't even consult
10 the headquarters back home. I spent millions of dollars. I spent millions of dollars
11 without even a telephone call. The power that I exercised at that time is so much those
12 that the judge advocate at headquarters got, not concerned, but got a little bit interested to
13 look at it from a legal point of view. He wrote a long paper to try and find some basis for
14 my exercise of this enormous power. He came out, but never, never, never they had of
15 course raised a single question to say, "Why did you do that? This is money." Somehow
16 I had inspired enough confidence or they knew that were embarrassed that they didn't
17 really bother. They would be second guessing the experts, but somehow this lasted for
18 four years. I did the same thing in England, in France—France was the most important
19 one because we were employing at the time ten thousand people, Morocco. In Morocco,
20 not only in Morocco, not only created the coordinated committee, but I designated my
21 Moroccan counterpart, a friend of mine. I said—he was, I knew it, honorable and smart
22 and a man with some reputation in the country and authority and connections. So I said,
23 "I'm jaded, you become that." He says, "Okay. I'll tell you what you have to do. You
24 don't even have to worry about it." So you know, he said, "I will office and here it is,"
25 and in Turkey and in Greece. In Turkey a little bit less because we didn't have very
26 many people at the time, but in Greece it was the same thing. Again I selected the men
27 and told the Ministry of Defense of Greece that this is a good man to do it and they—.

28 RV: Did—you just got paid a flat salary?

29 JC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. No, by this time I was GS-14, a GS-14.

30 RV: Okay, a GS-14.

31 JC: Okay, GS-14 and then I rose to GS-15.

1 RV: Now can you give an example of what kind of projects were going on, that
2 you were organizing?

3 JC: The—well, let's take the classic one, Waji, Greece. The French government
4 would come in and say they had formed unions. They said that they are looking for
5 increases. So informally I would talk to my counterpart in France who has now what it
6 is. So what is some support. So they would give me statistics of increases in the French
7 government, in the private sector. So it all worked out. Once I was convinced that this,
8 this and I hit on the percentage that would be reasonable. Also then I would just start
9 thinking about this in these terms. Without getting into an agreement and then you are—
10 so then it was of the holidays. Then there was the promotion process, the codification of
11 personal months, of transfers, an awful lot of technical things that personnel managers do
12 in every company, in every office, but in this case, because if this is our basis, the owners
13 of seven hundred employees, there are six hundred there, all of them at considerable
14 distance, no coordination. So we were establishing the basic conditions for the whole
15 country, for all three services.

16 RV: Wow, a lot of power, a lot of autonomy.

17 JC: A lot of power, a lot of autonomy.

18 RV: Did you enjoy the job?

19 JC: Oh, enormously, enormously always. I have no qualms exercising power. I
20 have no qualms and I know how to take authority. Anyone with less flair for power and
21 authority would never have lasted and would never had dared to do it, but he had seen it
22 there and it would be constantly on the phone. It would have the system unworkable and
23 it would have collapsed. But I never felt that I was sticking my neck out. I was prepared
24 to defend a case and I was going to. So this, then, but in order to—then in one of my
25 visits to Morocco, that required a lot of traveling. That's when I had opportunities to buy
26 that *chateau de kem*. Then so, Morocco however, here is an interesting aspect. Morocco
27 was a French protectorate. So the agreement for them to build the bases and also it was
28 negotiated with the French government was before the Moroccan independence. So
29 when Morocco became independent shortly thereafter in 1956 the Moroccan government
30 said, "Bases? We know of no bases in Morocco. What are you talking about?"

31 RV: They didn't know?

1 JC: They knew. The bases was there. There was at one time twenty thousand
2 Moroccans working on the bases. So they wanted to dissociate themselves with an
3 agreement that was made with the colonial power. So now you come in and negotiate
4 with us and negotiate with us. In order to negotiate it also involved payments, it involved
5 renting, and other of these things. The American government was not ready to enter into
6 such negotiations. So we went about running the business and flying planes and doing
7 things. So in a country whose government did not recognize the existence of those bases,
8 it was a peculiar situation, not entirely unknown. Here I came to Morocco to negotiate
9 with the Moroccan government that ignores the bases an agreement whereby the
10 Moroccan government will become employer of the employees on the bases. It was
11 bizarre.

12 RV: It worked?

13 JC: Yes. I had connections in Morocco. So the military in Morocco, the U.S.
14 military, all left, who is that youngster that comes here and he's going to do this and that
15 within a month. Within a month I had negotiated the agreement and I had set up the
16 office. I had opened the account in the Moroccan treasury to receive our money, within a
17 month. You would be amazed how many sad faces among the military everywhere,
18 especially the Navy in Port Lyautey at the time. It was, but I did this because of my
19 connections from my previous experience, the work with France. So the Minister of
20 Finance was a very good friend whom I had entertained in Washington when he came on
21 a visit and did things. So I went in and saw him. I said, "This has to be done." He
22 was—now he didn't like that, but I said, "I know, that's the only way and see you
23 continue to ignore the bases, we're going to set up this office. We'll be a part of yours.
24 You have no connection with you. All you have to do is—there would be the money
25 there, you take it or you don't take." So I convinced him on the basis of friendship. No,
26 it could not be done otherwise. Without personal, mutual trust, it could not have been
27 done. Then, I gave a party to celebrate the event and invited a lot of the Moroccan people
28 that there was. Charles Yost was at the time the ambassador, major figure in the
29 diplomatic service. He raised a glass and he said literally, "John Condon put us all to
30 shame."

31 RV: Really?

1 JC: Yes, yes.

2 RV: How did that make you feel?

3 JC: He said, "Put us all to shame because all of you," all of them had discounted
4 the possibility completely. So that did it.

5 RV: You got it done.

6 JC: Then I got it done. I got it done.

7 RV: So you were building your reputation as a negotiator, as (inaudible).

8 JC: A negotiator, right, exactly. So that's what helped me exercise the authority
9 that I did. Again I ran that office in Morocco single handedly. There, I did not have—I
10 negotiated but the local people, the Navy, was a small unit and the Army had nobody. So
11 really I was really the authority. I was negotiator. I was doing that whole thing. It was
12 good. That lasted for three or four years. Then during one of my visits to Morocco—this
13 will interest you—my visit in Morocco, there was a reception at the embassy. The labor
14 attaché at the embassy, come back to live, was at all I got to know him and if he knew
15 what I was doing, he too acknowledged that it was a major feat. So he invited me. He
16 had no reason to invite me to the reception, but he invited. I went and met with so many
17 people. I saw a man of modest appearance and quiet. So I approached him. His name
18 was Bob Smith Simpson. He was from the State Department on loan to the Labor
19 Department. He had come to see the labor minister for something or other because they
20 (inaudible). So we talked about this and told him what I was doing. He thought it over a
21 bit. He expressed disappointment that he had not been able to see the Minister of Labor
22 because he was busy, though he recognized that the embassy was doing their best to get
23 the appointment, but somehow it didn't work. So I looked him straight in the eye, "Bob,
24 when would you like to have the appointment?" He says, "Any time. I'm here and I
25 have nothing to do." I said, "Eleven o'clock tomorrow." He said, "Eleven o'clock
26 tomorrow." I can see it, like who is that youngster now who's going to make an
27 appointment when an entire embassy mobilized it (inaudible), but he kept his cool and
28 didn't express any of his doubts. He said, "Eleven o'clock then, all right. So I'll call you
29 either tomorrow or tonight or tomorrow morning and I'll confirm it to you." So I called
30 the labor minister, another friend and said, "There is this fellow"—but I told Bob, I said,
31 "I'll make this appointment for you, but it will be on a give and take basis. You will ask

1 him questions. He will hear his views, but you'll tell him also what are the views of
2 Washington on this particular matter of what are you doing." "Oh, yes, yes I have no
3 problem with that, I always do it." "Good, Bob, because others don't do it." So I got
4 appointment. So I called up the labor minister, I said, "There is this fellow. He seems to
5 have some interesting things to say from Washington." I had no idea what he was going
6 to say, but I said the same thing I always said and he impressed me. I said, "Nice enough
7 fellow for you to receive him. So would you receive him tomorrow at eleven o'clock?"

8 RV: And he said yes?

9 JC: He said yes. He said, "Okay, John, if you say so, I'll go get him and what's
10 his name?" He wrote it down. So I called up Bob and said, "Eleven o'clock tomorrow."
11 So he went, got to take care of his business, he find me to thank me. A week later a
12 telegram comes from the State Department, posted to the Air Force, "Would you release
13 John Condon to join the State Department for an assignment as labor attaché?" So, then
14 there were difficulties, especially in the headquarters, but the top man, the head of
15 personnel in Washington, John Watts, he immediately one day flown in from
16 Washington. He said, "We will stay in the way of John Condon" and the (inaudible)
17 goes, "Never, never. It's an honor. It's an honor," he said, "It's an honor for the Air
18 Force that the State Department's coming to recruit among us, yes."

19 RV: What year was this?

20 JC: This is 1960.

21 RV: 1960.

22 JC: 1960.

23 RV: Okay, so you—where did you go to become labor attaché?

24 JC: I don't—this was—because I was so new in the State Department, but I was
25 going to be first on loan to the Labor Department and work under Smith Simpson the
26 man for whom I got the appointment. So I went and moved the pro—I'll spare you the
27 details of that report. Anyway, so then I was signed and sworn in, sent to the labor
28 department and I was in charge of Africa. So for the entire labor affairs for the whole of
29 Africa.

30 RV: Wow.

1 JC: Yes. It was quite a job, but by the time I knew the exercise initially and
2 authority. It didn't bother me and Smith Simpson was a marvelous fellow to work with.
3 He's the one who taught me on every clipping you put the date and the newspaper on.
4 He caught me once or twice not having done. He said "John, don't you ever do that."

5 RV: To document date.

6 JC: Exactly to put the date, definitely, the date and the name of the newspaper
7 from which the clipping came. It was good advice and he drove home. From there on
8 never, never a clipping has gone out of my hands without a date.

9 RV: Now from where did you work, from Washington or did you?

10 JC: Washington, Washington, Washington. They have a special international
11 labor affairs office in the Labor Department that with one man in charge of every
12 continent. So I got Africa.

13 RV: What kind of things did you do? Give me an example.

14 JC: There were—in a lot of places there were labor attachés, so their reports
15 came to me and if there was action required I was the one to follow it and initiate it and to
16 see it through the bureaucracy. If we wanted some requests, I corresponded with the
17 ambassadors that we were for broader interests. So it was a meaningful job. It was
18 meaningful, a full time job in deed. The job wasn't—you could make it as full as you
19 wanted. I initiated correspondence with ambassadors that somebody else would never
20 have thought of done, or dared do it. So it worked out very well.

21 RV: Did you travel a lot?

22 JC: No, no, budgetary restraints, but it was not really necessary because we had
23 the labor attaché's report. So then there was a question being discussed in the State
24 Department, the Labor Department to assign a—to create a job for a labor attaché in
25 Tunisia. So of course the State Department was concerned because the Labor
26 Department had any point to make, since they were labor attachés, although they were
27 those Foreign Service officers, we're all foreign service officers, but they had a primary
28 interest in the reporting. So there were negotiating and there was a question. There is
29 always a committee in the State Department that makes the selection and the
30 appointments. That's the first active. So again I wrote a memorandum.

31 RV: You did? You did the same thing again?

1 JC: I did the same thing again.
2 RV: To appoint yourself.
3 JC: Appoint myself.
4 RV: Labor attaché in Tunisia.
5 JC: Labor attaché in Tunisia now. I'd rather move on with the argumentation for
6 it, first to establish the position and second to appoint John Condon as the labor attaché.
7 It sailed.
8 RV: It sailed.
9 JC: It sailed through without anybody calling back, without anybody asking,
10 without anybody mentioning any competitors because I doubt that there would have been
11 anybody who could have thought of any other more experienced. So here was going to
12 be my first post.
13 RV: How did other people not know about the position?
14 JC: They knew, but it was being negotiated to establish—it was not quite firm to
15 establish it or not. So I threw in not only the arguments for establishing it, but also the
16 person to do it.
17 RV: The person, yes.
18 JC: So it is set.
19 RV: And you got it?
20 JC: And I got it.
21 RV: Now what year was this?
22 JC: This is 1951 now, 19—.
23 RV: '61.
24 JC: '61.
25 RV: '61. Okay. So you became labor attaché in Tunisia.
26 JC: Labor attaché on my first post to Tunisia. So after about a year in
27 Washington we were off to Tunisia. The children were still young. It was very pleasant.
28 I knew the job after serving in the Department of Labor and getting all those labor attaché
29 reports. So I immediately got the sense of the whole thing. So there was no problem.
30 There was—the ambassador there was a bit of the old school, but pleasant enough man.
31 The labor attaché's assigned to the political section. So the—.

1 RV: So you worked in the embassy?

2 JC: In the embassy, we worked at the embassy. The rest of this stuff, remember
3 the political section depending on the size of the embassy may have anywhere from two
4 to ten staff members. So I was and I went there with a pretty senior grade. I was a class
5 three which is the equivalent of GS-15. So life went on very well. I got to know enough
6 of our people very well. Then Algeria became independent and attracted international
7 interest and the State Department as well. So they decided to transfer me to Algeria
8 while retaining responsibility for both Tunisia and Libya. So make it a regional sort of
9 job.

10 RV: Okay. Where were you stationed, in Algiers?

11 JC: Then—yes. We left. We actually drove. We drove from Tunisia, went to
12 Algiers and we started business there in Algiers. There we met a lot of people. In
13 Algiers we made an impact. I don't think there was another diplomat as known and as
14 well connected in Algiers as we were.

15 RV: Okay. How many people were on your staff?

16 JC: On my staff, I was by myself, but the whole embassy had about oh, twelve,
17 fifteen professionals.

18 RV: What year did this happen?

19 JC: This is 1962 now.

20 RV: What kind of—describe what you would do as a labor attaché in Algeria?

21 JC: The (inaudible) is follows anything that has to do with labor, not only unions,
22 labor legislation, labor practices by the employers and extension the employer's
23 association. The labor courts—anything that has anything to do with labor.

24 RV: And you report back to Washington to see—here's what's happening.

25 JC: Report back to Washington. Here is what happens, here is something new,
26 here is something that doesn't work well. So both as a political significant event and
27 something that could be useful for the thinking of the labor people in the Labor
28 Department, because it's supposed to—Tunisia government hit an idea of how to
29 compensate unemployment that has a regional possibility. So the Labor Department
30 wanted to know about it so that they can give it a thought too. So this sort of thing, but
31 from the political point of view is the emphasis on unions, structure activities, political

1 orientation and where they throw their weight and how much influence they have. Of
2 course immediately after independence, the Algerian unions had tremendous influence.
3 Ben Bella was there. We became strong personal friends with Ben Bella. Many a times
4 he would pick up our children in his arms and play with them and very well, to the extent
5 that the first time I wrote a memorandum I wrote a telegram for the department on things
6 that Ben Bella, the president of the republic, had told me that were very interesting, but
7 Bill Porter, who was the ambassador knows. He called me and said, "Leave Ben Bella to
8 me. Leave Ben Bella to me because—now write a memorandum and send it to me and
9 I'll know what to do with it, but leave Ben Bella to me because you don't know what the
10 climate is back in Washington. So I better handle Ben Bella." There was no problem
11 with me. I thought it was all right to do it, but there was a memorandum for the
12 ambassador was planning to get for me.

13 RV: You said you made a tremendous impact there. What did you mean by that?

14 JC: That people volunteer information and people accepted advice, suggestions in
15 that respect, both equally. The major problem for a diplomat is to obtain information that
16 you don't find in the press. Otherwise you read the press, don't question it. That
17 depends upon the type of relationships you have with the local people and people in the
18 norm or people in authority. So because of our activity and in that respect a lot of credit
19 goes to Nancy because she's an awfully good mistress of a house and terribly good cook
20 and always had a smile. So she was a very good teammate. That played an enormous
21 role because I had no problem giving her a one-hour notice and have ten people for lunch
22 or dinner. One-hour notice was the maximum or to increase from five to ten with no
23 notice sometimes. She was always prepared and always had a smile, never alarmed,
24 never panic and despite the children and everything else. So it worked.

25 RV: Was it a success—I'm sorry—was it a success because Algeria was such a
26 new country, because it was open to new ideas and open to suggestions?

27 JC: Yes, exactly because it was new country indeed. After that though, they were
28 so involved in their fractions, in their inner fightings. I saw that it became extremely
29 more difficult, but those that had friendships with Algiers, even subsequently, they were
30 able to work, but you had to have friendships established where the mutual trust was
31 unshakable. That survived even the bad times that Algeria done, but in our case it was

1 much easier because there was no such thing. There is the writer's representative, very
2 ingenious journalist, was also of Greek descent and the Trotskyite authorization man who
3 befriended the Algerians and he was there to try to run the major experiment that was
4 going to shape world history of authorization. He was there. He was also Greek. So,
5 between the Algerian friends and the Greek connections there we had sources of
6 information that nobody else had.

7 RV: How long were you in doing this with Algiers?

8 JC: We left in '64.

9 RV: Okay. So for two years.

10 JC: We left in '64, but the one little thing that perhaps is worth mentioning, I
11 retained responsibility for Tunisia. So after a few months, say three or four months I
12 thought that I better go back to Tunisia and look up and see what the embassy wants me
13 to do and just keep in touch. So the embassy was happy to see me back. The ambassador
14 gave the in it for us and he asked me whom would you like to invite. So I invited a
15 couple other, a couple of people. The two, the rectors were given ahead a very good idea
16 to organize to structure the country, to organize national offices, national office for
17 textile, national office for fisheries. He put capable men there and without intervening
18 with the heavy state hand promoting the activities of the (inaudible). In the case of the
19 fisheries the men who ran it was an ingenious man. He brought fish to every corner of
20 Tunisia through the refrigerator trucks. His ideas, he was already alone. So we have to
21 deal—the women got together. The men at that time everybody was smoking so to have
22 a cigar. We found ourselves myself, the director of fisheries, the director of textiles and
23 the ambassador who is a tall man and somehow the conversation drifted about
24 reassignments of Foreign Service officers. The two Tunisians eloquently and almost
25 vehemently complained that we changed, we transferred our diplomats too soon. Hardly
26 we know the country and they're gone. We have to start all over again with new people.
27 They were lamenting this type of situation. In order to confirm what they had in mind is
28 that they turned to me and said, "Take you for example. You stayed in Tunisia, what four
29 years? That's the way to do it. That's the way." Thirteen months.

30 RV: You were only there for thirteen months.

31 JC: I had stayed thirteen months.

1 RV: But they thought you were there for four years.

2 JC: Yes, because they knew me. The best compliment anybody ever gave.

3 RV: In front of the ambassador.

4 JC: In front of the ambassador because we looked at each other, the ambassador.

5 Nobody said the thirteen months because we didn't want to disappoint. So we looked at

6 each other, thirteen months.

7 RV: Wow. How did you—what were the Algerian people like? Were they

8 traumatized from their experience with the French? How did they find the Americans?

9 JC: The American thanks to John Kennedy, they like Americans. That's where

10 the thing is. For once we dissociate ourselves from the colonial power and we took

11 position in favor of the national aspirations of the country. Yes.

12 RV: Tell me about Kennedy's influence in Europe and in North Africa.

13 JC: Kennedy was more to the charismatic, to the charisma of the man and to the

14 aura that had been created in the United States first and transferred throughout the world

15 and the *Ich bin ein Berliner* played its role also. But the personal charisma transcended

16 the limits of the United States and captured the whole world, captured the whole world.

17 It's as simple as that and as complicated as that.

18 RV: Yes. I'd say that's very complicated and simple in a sense. So a strong

19 presidential personality in the United States carries a lot of weight around the world?

20 JC: Yes. I would say that the trouble we have had with France and Germany and

21 the rest of the world, the only thing was the personality of Bush, the way he composed

22 himself. A lot of Frenchman are telling me—well, they tried to rationalize the United

23 Nations illegal and all this other stuff, but deep in their hearts and if you press them a

24 little bit, they'll come out. It was the style, revolt against the style.

25 RV: Have you known any other presidents besides Kennedy who's had that kind

26 of positive impact because of their personality?

27 JC: No, I don't think so. Truman, Truman.

28 RV: I wanted to ask you about him, what your impression of him was.

29 JC: Yes, Truman, Truman did the same thing. Truman did the same.

30 RV: How so?

1 JC: Truman, the modesty. Again it's the style, modesty and at the same time
2 decisiveness that came across at the summit and open to new ideas, NATO, Marshall
3 Plan, all this works over there took a very generous, open minded, quick thinking
4 sensitive man.

5 RV: Berlin Airlift. How much did the Marshall Plan, handing out that money,
6 play into that?

7 JC: The Marshall Plan made the world because it made Europe and Europe made
8 the rest of the world. That was perhaps the greatest mistakes I suppose of Russia is not to
9 accept the Marshall Plan because—but then again their communism may not have
10 survived.

11 RV: Right. That's been there—that was their greatest fear wasn't it, to accept
12 that?

13 JC: That was Stalin's theory exactly. That's why he didn't do it. Perhaps from
14 his point of view it was the right decision, from his point of view.

15 RV: But not maybe for his people.

16 JC: Not maybe for his people, or for the rest of the world because if Russia had
17 taken off also—if a major country like Russia takes off the rest of the world follow soon.
18 It would have accelerated the process that development of Europe as well. The Balkans
19 would not have fallen behind. No. It would have made enormous difference, but perhaps
20 would it have shortened the days of communism unless they hit on the ideas the Chinese
21 capitalist economy, communist politics.

22 RV: How much of a role did NATO play in North Africa, when you were there?

23 JC: No.

24 RV: None?

25 JC: None.

26 RV: In Algeria with the French being a major member of NATO, no problems?

27 JC: No, no, no. There was not the consideration did not, no. It was all—no, not
28 at all.

29 RV: Why was Algeria so successful initially in setting up their government?

30 JC: I think the personality and talents of Ben Bella were a bit short of what was
31 required at the time. The socialist, Marxist almost philosophy prevailed and undermined.

1 That's why the country did not take off. Then there was the dictatorship of the military
2 under Boumediene and that further thwarted any credibility of the country. In due time
3 the Islamists developed because of the failure of both the military, because of corruption
4 and therefore the whole thing went downhill and hasn't stopped yet.

5 RV: I was going to ask you, has it even stopped?

6 JC: It has not even stopped yet. No it hasn't even stopped because the military
7 cannot quite eliminate the Islamist warfare. It seems unlikely that they will be able to do
8 it because they're operating like Viet Cong. So I don't think—I think they have less
9 support among the population than Viet Cong, considerably less I would go as far to say
10 as much, but nevertheless they do terrorize the countryside and they do persevere.
11 Therefore I don't see how an end to that can come about unless enlightened Muslim
12 clerics begin to speak out more forcefully, more repeatedly, more intensely and to
13 greater, greater audiences so that—to deprive of any little popular support that the
14 Islamists may still have. That's where I see—I think the military, the military in Algeria
15 are in the same position as we were in Vietnam, scoring now and then, and being
16 defeated here and there.

17 RV: And just dragging on and on.

18 JC: And dragging it on. A lot of people get killed and in their case means having
19 their throats slit.

20 RV: Right. Let me ask you about the religious aspect of Algeria and did you
21 sense at that time—and you'd spent time in North Africa, significant amount of time
22 here—did you sense a problem between the Muslim world and the Christian world that
23 was as significant or would forecast what's happening now?

24 JC: Nothing whatsoever, nothing whatsoever. In my days the secular alternative
25 was a real alternative. It was taking hold. It was taking over. Very few people, very few
26 women are veiled. A lot of women in the market, in the labor market and upholding jobs.
27 The brigiba drank a glass of juice on television on Ramadan purposely to convey the
28 message that this is a new period of time. Morocco almost the same. At this time
29 perhaps Morocco was the more religious, but not fanatics, not extremists, not the
30 fundamentalists. Simply more religious, but even there a lot of unveiled women, a lot, lot

1 of unveiled women at the time, a lot of them working and a lot of circumvented violation
2 of the Ramadan.

3 RV: What changed? Why did it—why did the secularism go away?

4 JC: What changed? I think the change came from outside. I'll hold Saudi Arabia
5 responsible for that. I think that because of their form of Islam, the Wahhabi, is an
6 extremely, almost fundamentalist— not almost, it's entirely fundamentalist. It's very
7 strict, very rigid, very narrow minded, very orthodox we would say although perhaps not
8 the best word. They are the ones financing the mosques throughout the world and they
9 are the ones who are installing the mufties in the mosques and they are the ones—so
10 Saudi Arabia presents a major, major risk to the entire western world, major. I am
11 convinced.

12 RV: Did you see it then? Did you see the risk then or has that become clearer
13 now?

14 JC: No, no, no. That has become clearer. Then it was not, no it was not
15 perceptible at all at the time. I don't think it started then. It was subsequent that they
16 started. I think Iran probably—so Istanbul with Islamic Republic and Iran.

17 RV: In the 1970s.

18 JC: Challenged the U.S. in 1970, challenged the Wahhabis, challenged the
19 Wahhabis. They from there one, they laid the foundations for the reaction.

20 RV: Okay. It's gone from there.

21 JC: It's gone from there, yes.

22 RV: Okay, okay. Why don't we take a break?

23 JC: So where are we? Algeria. After Algeria, yes, what happened? Yes, so
24 Algeria we were preparing in June 1964 to come to the U.S. for home leave, and returned
25 to Algiers. We have our orders, return to Algiers for another tour of duty, which means
26 for another two years. Just I think the day before we left or maybe two days before we
27 left a telegram came in, cancelled return orders and assigned John Condon to Vietnam.

28 RV: To Vietnam.

29 JC: To Vietnam.

30 RV: Okay. What did you know at this point about what the United States was
31 doing in Southeast Asia?

1 JC: Nothing, next to nothing, except for the newspapers, except for the
2 newspapers.

3 RV: Okay. What was your impression of why the United States was even in
4 South Vietnam?

5 JC: At the time my impression, it remained for a long time that here was again
6 the communists playing their usual tricks, infiltrating and trying to subjugate another
7 country or another half a country and the usual Stalinist method through infiltration. My
8 golly we've got to stop them. There must be an end to that. I was sympathetic. I was
9 sympathetic. They couldn't stomach this kind of tactics and this kind of it because in this
10 kind of rigid, monolithic, approach to everything. But at that time of course everybody
11 was supposed to feel complimented because it was only the best and the brightest that
12 were sent to Vietnam by personal selection by President Johnson himself. So that was
13 the consolation. So we take it, took it of course, the orders. We were prepared to go any
14 place and Oklahoma. As a matter of fact there was some excitement because we hadn't
15 been to Asia at all. No we were—in fact we were pleased despite the fact of the situation.
16 It is true at that time the situation was not that bad. We felt a little bit of challenge. We
17 always believed that only the best and the brightest were sent there. So we went there.
18 We arrived one Saturday. So the embassy had reserved hotel rooms. We checked in with
19 those. The children were at the time, ten, eight and seven. So the first thing we do
20 Sunday morning, we go to the local market. This is a French country. So Sunday
21 morning market is a must. So we go to the house and we discovered all those flowers
22 and all those fruits. We said hallelujah. This is.

23 RV: In Saigon?

24 JC: In Saigon, hallelujah. We spent the entire morning until we bought more
25 than we could eat, plus durian. Do you know durian?

26 RV: Yes, sir.

27 JC: So, there is nothing in the world that they can match durian. You know to
28 some biased people they have the reputation because of the odor, but to show you what
29 an unbiased person is capable of, we took, we opened. It was a rich fruit. We ate half
30 and the other one, we kept it inside the room of the hotel with the air-conditioning, all
31 windows closed, didn't smell a thing.

1 RV: Really?

2 JC: Yes.

3 RV: Wow.

4 JC: Now what innocence can do. Nobody had told—.

5 RV: Told you about it yes.

6 JC: Had talked about it. For us, we smelled a little bit we didn't find—fruit is.

7 Peaches smell too. So we finished it up—if on a day, so we get the lights organized,

8 went to the office.

9 RV: What was your official position?

10 JC: Again, labor attaché, labor attaché. By the time—.

11 RV: What were your first impressions of Vietnam?

12 JC: By that time it was two, class-two maybe. It was a—.

13 RV: What were your first impressions of Vietnam?

14 JC: It was a—oh, it was pleasant, a happy impression, people animated, lots of

15 them, markets of pets and all around, the tricycles everywhere, summer, a bit of pollution

16 but that didn't bother us. No we found it nice. It was warm, but we liked—when the

17 people asked, we say there is no place too hot for us. So we—the pleasant impression.

18 The embassy was at the time in an old building and it was not very well equipped. It was

19 really not a proper office, but nevertheless it was an office. My office was from the

20 mezzanine that had been cut in half and it was from the windows up. So it was a small

21 office. I had a secretary and a local assistant. I went about meeting people, beginning

22 with the labor minister and the labor unions, they came with stuff for a book. A very, in

23 some respects, a fascinating personality, political animal, authoritarian, but he exercised

24 in the usual Asian way with mild expressions. So he welcomed me. We got along

25 immediately, very, very well. I never had the slightest problem with Buu. The question

26 is to assess to what extent was it really a representative group, to what extent it was

27 infiltrated. I had no easy way of knowing about that. I tried to devise ways for detecting

28 this, to what extent—so they were prepared to play the role as trade unions and not as an

29 instrument of a political party, which some people had suspected at the time and which

30 our friend Phung believes was the case. I think he exaggerates, to deny it would be an

31 exaggeration also, but—.

1 RV: That the labor parties were political parties.

2 JC: Yes. So I think, I think Buu had the best of the trade union organization that
3 the circumstances would have allowed, permitted anybody to organize.

4 RV: What were the circumstances in Saigon?

5 JC: The circumstances was that the Diem regime dictatorial, I think he was able
6 to get in good graces with Diem by playing up to their Catholic beliefs. So though Buu
7 was not a Catholic, but he had a lot of people around him that were Catholic. So he was
8 able to safeguard himself against Diem from that point of view. On the other hand if Buu
9 probably was convinced that Diem's way was not a bad way to go about, perhaps
10 exercise of dictatorial power. I think he had some doubts about the brother, but at the
11 same time he was convinced that it was not a bad way to go about it. Perhaps he could
12 succeed and perhaps he should be supported.

13 RV: How was he—how tolerant was he of the labor movement?

14 JC: I think they were playing a game of mutual concessions I guess. "All right, I
15 will not push the direction, but provided that you don't push me in another direction
16 either." So they had established a modus vivendi. At the same time basically Buu
17 thought that Diem was the right man and he might pull it off. Subsequently he changed
18 his mind and he may have—and he spoke about Diem, although he never spoke to mean
19 outright critical things. He was always guarded. I think basically he had the conviction
20 that he might have pulled it off if he had been loud or he had given the means without too
21 much interference, if the military cannot intervene. Where I would fault him is in making
22 too much allowance for the operations of his brother, brother Diem and of his wife. I
23 think he did not distance himself sufficiently from his brother, but basically on Diem he
24 thought that he was all right. He could have done it.

25 RV: What do you think?

26 JC: I think so too.

27 RV: Really?

28 JC: Yes.

29 RV: Why?

30 JC: Because he was prepared to exercise independence. He was prepared to
31 assert himself against the Americans or to make his existence independent of Americans,

1 although he was aware that he needed the means. But in terms of will, he was prepared
2 to do that. He thought that rather than fight, making a deal with Hanoi is not the un-
3 Vietnam thing to do. I think in other way whether he did it with Hanoi or he pulled it all
4 himself with the proper means and money from us, he could have done it.

5 RV: You're talking about a coalition government, correct?

6 JC: Coalition government, yes. A coalition government, maybe he would
7 develop the idea of two governments, one nation, somehow play with the idea of rather
8 than fight and kill each other let's see what we can do.

9 RV: How realistic was that considering Ho Chi Minh's attitude of one Vietnam
10 and one party?

11 JC: I think if he was—if he had believed that otherwise the Americans would
12 come in, he would have considered it. If he had credible fear, which he was entitled to
13 have at the time, fear that the Americans would come and march in and it would be
14 another massacre, he would have considered. He might have extracted too many
15 concessions from Diem, but Diem would have accepted it. He would have been consoled
16 that it was good for Vietnam.

17 RV: Now, how realistic was that considering the United States attitude toward
18 Diem and no way?

19 JC: Well, we know because he was killed. He paid with his life for this, you
20 know this exactly.

21 RV: Right. The United States was not prepared to allow communists in Vietnam.

22 JC: Right. It was not prepared, foolishly, foolishly.

23 RV: So the domino theory and that exaggeration.

24 JC: Yes. The domino theory was a bluff that some people played. It was almost
25 a fraud.

26 RV: Why did it gain so much credence?

27 JC: Yes, why. It sounded good. It sounded possible. It sounded credible. We sit
28 there and we know how the communists behave. Of course they'll come and they'll take
29 it and down to South Vietnam and then of course they'll come to Cambodia and then
30 they'll come to Laos. It sounded very possible.

1 RV: Did the Johnson administration believe that everything was being run from
2 the Kremlin, that it was a monolithic, worldwide—?

3 JC: Yes and no. The policy was there. I say the same thing for Russia as I say to
4 people that when they credit CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) for major events and
5 things. There is I say, if it were, if it were only true. I think the Soviet would say to
6 Johnson, “If it were only true that we could run things from over there from Moscow, if it
7 could only be true.”

8 RV: It just wasn't the case.

9 JC: It wasn't the case. It wasn't the case at all.

10 RV: Why not? Did they not have enough reach, enough power, enough money?

11 JC: No, because people stress it. We stretch them.

12 RV: Right.

13 JC: Yes. I don't think Ho Chi Minh would allow a single Russian soldier to step
14 in Vietnam, a single. He would have never allowed.

15 RV: But it did happen. There were Russian advisors, military advisors, there, but
16 not fighting soldiers.

17 JC: Fighting and advisors to show them how you fire this particular machine gun
18 and once we learn you go.

19 RV: What about the Chinese?

20 JC: Oh, the Chinese even worse. The Chinese were worse.

21 RV: Let me change out this disk real quick. Let's take a break.

22 RV: Okay, let's continue, starting a new disk. The Johnson administration was
23 so fearful, at least it shows in their National Security Council meetings that they thought
24 the Chinese would absolutely intervene if the United States did anything overt besides air
25 attacks in North Vietnam. Was the United States fear of Chinese intervention valid in
26 Southeast Asia or was it overblown?

27 JC: In my opinion, very humble opinion I must say, it was not valid. It was not
28 valid.

29 RV: Why do you say that?

1 JC: Because primarily the Vietnamese. I think the Vietnamese would rather fight
2 the Chinese than the Americans. I just don't believe it, don't believe it that there would
3 have been so.

4 RV: Did you think that at the time?

5 JC: Yes. I thought it at the time.

6 RV: Then why the cultural ignorance in Washington, at the White House?

7 JC: True, true, true, but there are people also themselves they have their own bias
8 and they stick to them. They are reinforced when they are being challenged by their
9 competitors. So they stick to their bias I think. The experience in Korea was so
10 traumatic that anything to avoid repetition of that experience would be worthwhile for all
11 those reasons. We did not have a declaration of war. Therefore the right to wage a
12 classic war against North Vietnam by invading it was not quite clear. So, all those
13 reasons were made for hesitation to do it. Plus the fact that it would have required
14 adjustments in the defense mechanisms and structure in South Vietnam. The bombing, if
15 we did, we only have stomach to do for so long and not for the decisive length that is
16 required. For all those reasons I think it was the easy way out to fear Chinese
17 intervention instead of coming ahead in grips with the problem and make a decision on it.
18 So I think the basic decision, the decision was to let Diem to try his chance and let him do
19 it. If he makes a deal with Ho Chi Minh, so be it. So we'll have another communist
20 country in the world, another half of the Vietnam that will become communist, okay.

21 RV: Well, again, the United States government publicly had said that that was
22 not going to be possible, that they would not allow that because of you know domino
23 theory, and X, Y and Z. They had said this to the world, to the United Nations, to the
24 American public. So why—how could that have worked then? I mean I've heard this
25 argument from other people that this one communist Vietnam, and perhaps communist
26 Laos and maybe communist Cambodia, so what? Big deal, but since—

27 JC: When we have an entire China and an entire Russia already so you add up—
28 that's where the mistake of the strategies of the United States. Okay we are capable of
29 ideological decisions. So we aren't communists. By golly, we will act as anti-
30 communist and will stop those communists, come what may, regardless of the
31 consequences. So, it was the opposite of the ideological decisions they were making, but

1 they were in the opposite (inaudible), but the basis was ideological and not clear
2 assessment of the—so because of the communists too. Why waste all these resources on
3 all those millions of people when they could have had a flourishing South Vietnam from
4 which they could draw benefits and perhaps subverted some other way? So they acted
5 ideologically and we are capable of doing the same thing.

6 RV: So you saw Diem as more of a compromiser, or at least perhaps having the
7 ability to compromise in order—?

8 JC: Or his, his scheme of what they call it, the villages, the—?

9 RV: Strategic hamlet program?

10 JC: What?

11 RV: The strategic hamlet program?

12 JC: Right. It could work. It could have worked. I don't see it. With the
13 pacification program we tried practically the same thing, but we tried it as Americans.
14 They were Vietnamese trying it. So I wouldn't rule out—that could have—really that
15 would have been an argument in any negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. After he had a few
16 successes and really firmed up control of a few provinces, Ho Chi Minh would have
17 thought twice before he would challenge him. So he was not without cards in his hands,
18 Diem in negotiating some kind of a deal. So, on paper, on paper they negotiated with the
19 Americans and non-communists, and non anti-communist government in Vietnam. So
20 they didn't know at the time a few months later, a couple years later they would have
21 conquered it, but at the time they signed it and the best they could expect. They
22 expressed it by signing it was a non anti-communist government in Vietnam. So with
23 Diem, who could even offer him more, a friendly to communist Vietnam, but
24 independent, autonomous, to pursue its economic policies as they saw best which he
25 could throw in which would benefit North Vietnam because we were going to be dealing
26 with you.

27 RV: So Diem was a lost opportunity?

28 JC: I think so, a lost opportunity and the trauma of the Vietnam War itself is
29 incalculable, anything, communists, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand would not be
30 worth the trauma that we experienced and from which we'll never escape.

31 RV: There's no getting over?

1 JC: We'll never escape from the trauma of Vietnam.

2 RV: We, meaning the world?

3 JC: The Americans, the Americans, the Americans, the Americans. The world
4 was very happy, I mean anything that slows down the hegemonic tendencies of America
5 is a good thing for the world. It is a good thing for the world. So, but for the Americans
6 it's a trauma I don't think we will ever, ever, ever free ourselves in a degree less than
7 dimensions that we will never overcome, the trauma of the assassination of Kennedy, of
8 Lincoln and Kennedy. I mean, these are traumas that the nation will bear for a thousand
9 years.

10 RV: Interesting. How much fault then was Kennedy in at least giving a tacit
11 okay to the coup that took out Diem?

12 JC: Right. That's true. He bears the responsibility for it. Has it been proven?

13 RV: Not definitively, it has not.

14 JC: Yes, in my opinion, in my opinion, the Vietnamese generals acted pretty
15 much on their own or with the encouragement of individual CIA agents acting on their
16 own because that is—that happens. I have practiced it myself. I mean it happens. It
17 happens. It is possible indeed that some CIA agent acting in his own beliefs with the best
18 of intentions of course had a friend among the military, among the generals and sort of
19 indicated that perhaps if that is what you want to do, you know best. That was enough
20 for the generals that had already considered the idea to allow themselves the thing that
21 they had a clear light.

22 RV: Did you know anybody in Vietnam who could have acted on their own like
23 that?

24 JC: No, no I didn't. As a matter of fact, I didn't know—I have kept a certain
25 distance with the CIA, not out of respect for their work, not for mine. Those that are well
26 known that were around the embassy of course I did, but otherwise, no I didn't have
27 much to do unless they were getting ahead. They didn't approach me either so. So we
28 did. I think they were doing things with the labor unions, giving money and doing some
29 things, but that did not interfere with my work. So they were doing their duty. I was
30 doing mine.

31 RV: How long were you actually in Vietnam?

1 JC: In Vietnam, '64 to '66, two years.
2 RV: Okay, two years stint.
3 JC: A full tour.
4 RV: So you saw '64 before the United States was there en masse. Then you saw
5 '66 when troops had definitely started coming in. What changes did you see in that time
6 period?
7 JC: The changes, the changes, other than the physical presence of troops.
8 RV: Other than the physical presence?
9 JC: Other than the cutting of the trees which for the Vietnamese must have been a
10 terrible thing, must have been a—.
11 RV: Why do you say that?
12 JC: Because they were interfering with the environment, with their physical thing
13 with which they lived, the crease which they grew. Also to a certain extent have some
14 foreign forces for the interests of something or other for me to see better to machine gun
15 people or to have the tracks go easily by, hereby cutting. I mean, that alone must have
16 produced at least fifty dead Viet Cong.
17 RV: How about defoliation?
18 JC: Oh, defoliation, right, defoliation. But then again, the people of the
19 countryside saw it, but the people got excited then they saw of course the effect and there
20 was an effect on the humans also. That alone was—and all Viet Cong said, “You want to
21 live under this people?” That’s all the Viet Cong said, called them out of the villages and
22 said, “Here you have, would you like to live with the people that do this to your trees?”
23 RV: Were you thinking that at the time? Were you feeling this?
24 JC: Oh, yes, yes. I felt that at the time, but I didn’t think—I don’t think I wrote
25 anything about it. Perhaps I did some, but even if I did I did it without any illusions that
26 somebody would read it and do something about it. These decisions were made probably
27 right in the Oval Office. I think it took the Oval Office to decide a major operation of
28 this type. So for labor attaché in Saigon to say that, you don’t know what you’re doing, it
29 would be too much.
30 RV: Right. What was your chain of command? Where did you go—who was
31 right above you, the ambassador?

1 JC: Above me is the political consulate, was the political consulate who reports
2 to the ambassador through the DCM, what they call the Deputy Chief of Mission, the
3 number two man.

4 RV: How did the chain work? Did you have good communication within the
5 embassy?

6 JC: Oh, very much so, very much happened there. I was left alone. I was left
7 alone.

8 RV: To do your work?

9 JC: No. There was no close supervision to tell me to whom to see, who myself. I
10 don't think I would have taken it if anybody had tried it, but nobody tried to do that. I
11 befriended the mayor of Saigon who was not connected with labor, but I befriended him.
12 I think I did more than all of the other embassy of him in stopping demonstrations and
13 sending the police where he hesitated to. He was weak. He was Buddhist. He hesitated.
14 When I talked to him I said, I said, "You have responsibility. This city is your
15 responsibility. You've got to keep it in order. You've got to have respect for law and
16 order. You're not going to allow anybody who has things that he has a cause to protest
17 and march down and burn things and burning himself, you cannot do it." "But," he
18 said—he was hesitant. He was hesitant, although elected mayor, major, I always said,
19 "No, if you got to, I'm not going to leave that office before you call the police and order
20 for them to do their duty. That's all you have to do. Do their duty, their duty is to keep
21 order. You don't do anything else. You don't make a major political statement. You
22 keep order." He did that.

23 RV: And he did.

24 JC: He did. He did.

25 RV: How many times did you have to talk to him about things like this?

26 JC: Oh, about three or four times. But then he thanked me because there was
27 somebody by him to steal his curds and to—of course there was again mutual trust.
28 Although now we'll jump a little bit, but that's worth telling. In Tunis and during this
29 one summer there came a gentleman. He happened to be black, to establish the Peace
30 Corps, to negotiate the Peace Corps, but it was his first assignment abroad. He was not
31 very—he had not been very long in the Peace Corps. It was a thankless assignment and

1 an unwise assignment for him to do, but I befriended him. I said, "Bruce," I said, "Don't
2 worry, we'll do things together." I said, "Don't worry, we'll get there," because he was
3 pretty despondent and he had every reason to be, but it was terrible, terrible, the way the
4 Peace Corps handled that particular case. So I took him to the Deputy Minister of Labor
5 at the time, good friend also, being in the labor. So I introduce him and I said, "Here is
6 this," and he explained the Peace Corps and everything. We left it at that. So later in the
7 day he calls me up and says, "John, what is this business?" he says. I said, "Never mind,
8 Mohammed, I'll come and we'll talk about it." So I went, practically after office hours.
9 It was about six, seven o'clock. I said, "You can't hear this." So we went to them to
10 explain to him, this is the one. Oh, yes (inaudible). I said, "Couldn't we," I said, "We go
11 in and chat with him." I told them American boys who would leave the comfort of their
12 home and the prospect of their careers to come here and waste a year or two. I said
13 "Don't tell me this, they are CIA agents all of them." So, I looked at him. I said,
14 "Apparently he didn't like this." I said, "Robert, you see what time it is?" It was nine
15 o'clock by that time. "Why are you staying here? Are you a CIA agent, an agent of the
16 Tunisian government? You do it for the good of your country, don't you? You do it for
17 your will." I said, "They are not able to produce something for the good of their country.
18 Those young people are not able. You have the privilege, nobody else does." "John," he
19 said, "Don't tell me anything else."

20 RV: And that was settled it.

21 JC: That was it.

22 RV: So the Peace Corps could come into Tunisia.

23 JC: Peace Corps came in great numbers, in great numbers. Now, (inaudible) I go
24 to the Deputy Minister for Public Works. So the same spiel. So he was looking at me,
25 looking at me. He asked me a couple questions. He said, "I was going to suggest to send
26 him architects and engineers, this type of thing." He said, "John," he said, "Not only I
27 want you to send as many as possible, but I'll treat them in such a way that they'll never
28 return to the United States." The opposite, see now, the opposite. Manny, he was an
29 older man, an older man, he got picture. He was getting cheap labor, cheap architecture
30 to go all the things, to ask them to do anything he wants. He'll look in the eyes. It was
31 the color of the eyes immediately. He stopped to hear me talking, all of a sudden, "Not

1 only I want you to send as many as possible” he said, “But I’ll treat them in such a way
2 that they’ll never want to return to the United States.”

3 RV: Did he do so?

4 JC: He did, he did, absolutely. They did a marvelous job building the low-cost
5 housing and other things and always at their disposal. All they had to do is to ask the
6 ministry for anything they wanted and they had it.

7 RV: They had it.

8 JC: The Minister of Labor it worked out very well. They got nurses and all this
9 and other administrative people and worked very well. Mohammed recognized it. But it
10 took that final argument.

11 RV: Right. Why don’t we take a break for today?

12 JC: Okay.

Interview with John Condon

Session [2] of [2]

Date: May 8, 2003

1

2 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history
3 interview with Amb. John Condon. Today is May 8th, 2003. It is approximately 9:22AM
4 Central Standard time. We're again in the interview room in the Special Collections
5 Library on the campus of Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Sir, why don't we
6 pick up where we left off? You were in Saigon as a labor attaché. You mentioned before
7 we started recording here that you wanted to talk about an Air Force briefing that you had
8 recalled.

9 John Condon: Correct. When my former associates in France, in the Air Force,
10 heard that I was being assigned to Saigon they arranged for me a personal briefing by the
11 head of the Air Force intelligence.

12 RV: In Washington, DC?

13 JC: In Washington, DC, which is really a distinct honor in the gesture that I
14 should get such a high ranking briefing. It was indeed detailed, brought me up to date
15 where there was, what the situation was with military, but the point that perhaps deserves
16 to be recorded here and I retain is the general telling me that even if we sealed tight the
17 border between South and North Vietnam the problem would not have gone away. It
18 would continue the same intensity and with the same challenges.

19 RV: And this was in 1964?

20 JC: This is 1964.

21 RV: Did he offer any kind of alternative or something we should be doing?

22 JC: No. He did not offer alternative, but the implication was there. If I recall
23 correctly he spelled it out. It was obvious of course that this was an indigenous
24 movement that had the support of the people in South Vietnam and therefore this
25 emphasis of being a movement that is led and sustained and progressed by infiltration
26 from the North Vietnam was not correct.

27 RV: Okay. So he talked about that the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex coming
28 through Laos and infiltration from the North was not as heavy as we had suspected?

1 JC: No, he meant including the Ho Chi Minh trail that if we sealed everything, if
2 we sealed the borders of South Vietnam all around, all around, it would not have solved
3 the problem and it would not have even diminished the challenge.

4 RV: What were your thoughts when he said this to you?

5 JC: It so happened that intrigued me perhaps more than anything else, from all
6 the briefings that I have had. Also that was my conclusion before even he confirmed it
7 that indeed this emphasis of a challenge from the North was misleading and constituted
8 mis-information that could lead to major mistakes. That with this was—I wouldn't call it
9 uprising but reaction, reaction, movement from within the people of the South Vietnam
10 who saw it the ability to assert themselves as an independent identity and as an
11 independent society. Therefore not realizing that was the case, we were taking the wrong
12 steps to meet the challenge.

13 RV: Now, when you arrived in Saigon and after some time, did, what you
14 observed and what you heard, did it confirm what this Air Force individual had told you?

15 JC: It did indeed. It did and no better people to confirm it—there were the trade
16 union people with whom I had every one of them I had long conversations of course.
17 Also they all gave me to understand that this was a movement from within the South
18 Vietnamese population. Although they did not explain it in the terms that we use in
19 terms of hope for a national independent identity and autonomy, it was clear that this was
20 internal movement.

21 RV: You said you had long conversations with the leaders of the labor
22 movement. What would they tell you? What was their mood? What were they saying
23 about the people and the politics, society of South Vietnam?

24 JC: The leaders of course of my category was not with the rank and file, and the
25 opportunities for the rank and the file, it was a question of language if more than anything
26 else. But the leaders, they tended to be—they tended to be inspired by internal political
27 considerations. They have had problems of recognition from their own government to
28 begin with. Therefore their complaints were often against their own government for not
29 appreciating or recognizing the importance of trade unions in the effort to modernize and
30 democratize the country. But nevertheless they feared themselves the infiltration of Viet
31 Cong into the rank and file. As a matter of fact they took it for granted that this was

1 taking place, but as long as they were not able to get into leadership positions they felt
2 secure in the sense that the labor movement could continue to operate democratically and
3 freely. I visited a number of provinces and locals, we say local unions. Every instance I
4 realized that they were all very pleased to have an official American representative to
5 take the trouble to go and visit at the grass roots level. When I had opportunity to explain
6 what was my job in the embassy, they were indeed very surprised and very warmly
7 responding to the fact that there was such a person in the embassy specializing in the
8 trade union movement and the lot of the working people. We had many occasions to
9 explain my functions to the rank and file. The response every time was one most
10 gratifying and surprising and gave them what I felt at the time considerable self-
11 confidence and hope that their activity was useful in a broader sense than only in the
12 defense of the working people interests and hopes.

13 RV: What would you tell them exactly?

14 JC: Pardon me.

15 RV: What would you tell them?

16 JC: I was explaining to them the importance of the trade union movement in a
17 democratic society that democracy expresses its ways in a number of fields, that the
18 organization of the workers constitutes a means by which the workers as a group, as a
19 group, can express their hopes and their interests and pursue freely, freely, their, the
20 improvement of their lives and of their working positions. I think the main—I don't
21 think they had thought in such political terms that the trade union movement was such an
22 integral part of a democratic society. They saw it as strictly as a bread and butter issue
23 that the trade unions were representing the economic interests of the working people in
24 dealing with their employers. They didn't see that as a part of the broader picture, the
25 broader political picture of the evolution of the society.

26 RV: Were they able to understand this once you talked?

27 JC: Yes, yes, yes. I think they did. I think they did. I think that enhanced their
28 self-image as labor leaders and as labor militants and activists. Indeed I felt that I was
29 indeed enhancing—that's a good way of putting it—enhancing their self-image and their
30 own and the source of greater self-importance that they were doing something that had
31 broader impact than improving simply the working conditions of their members.

1 RV: When you spoke to them, was this a speech or were these words that you
2 wrote yourself or were you directed by anyone to say certain things or to promote certain
3 things?

4 JC: No, no, no. This was entirely at my own initiative. I felt this way. The only
5 thing is that they had to be translated, but the headquarters of the CVT, the CVT, the *La*
6 *Confederation Vietnamiennne du Travail*—we used the French initials—had a very able
7 translator of English to Vietnamese, very able young man who I believe is now in
8 California, most helpful. So I think that precisely was competent translation and
9 conveyed the subtleties of my explanation of the labor movement.

10 RV: Okay. How much reality was there that South Vietnamese understood what
11 democracy was and that they could actually form a legitimate democratic government
12 and have it survive and then flourish?

13 JC: It is true that democracy was a word that they had heard so very often, so, but
14 I don't think they had a grasp of the institutional arrangements that democracy implies,
15 but nevertheless what really mattered to them was freedom, freedom of expression,
16 freedom of organizing, freedom of standing up to the government, freedom of
17 confronting employers. Freedom was really the key word that conveyed their mood.
18 Democracy was a catchword that everybody was using. It was something good, but they
19 didn't have really a very clear understanding of what implied in terms of governmental
20 organization and structure. So, from that point of view it was interesting and that could
21 really present a challenge to the Viet Cong of whose idea of freedom was something
22 completely different.

23 RV: Which side do you think had a better road to success? Because there are
24 arguments that the way the South Vietnamese defined freedom and democracy was one
25 road to go down. Then the communists, the so-called communists, either the Viet Cong
26 or the North Vietnamese, mixing communism with nationalism, that you know, expelling
27 the foreigners and a one Vietnam idea. Which side had a better chance of succeeding do
28 you think?

29 JC: The Viet Cong did not speak in terms of freedom. Viet Cong spoke in terms
30 of nationalism, national identity, national—and independence, and national
31 independence. Therefore they were in a better position to do, obtain adhesion and to

1 have a favorable response. For our message of freedom was a little bit too sophisticated
2 for the people at the grass roots. For the leaders of course it was another story, but for the
3 people at the grass roots the freedom was not what really could motivate them to measure
4 sacrifices.

5 RV: It could not?

6 JC: It could not.

7 RV: Okay. Now, let me ask you more of a hypothetical question. How much
8 does it matter what the peasants think. Isn't it the elite that runs the government and the
9 bourgeoisie? Do you know what I'm asking? How important are the proletariat?

10 JC: That's a good question, a fair question indeed. We must make a distinction
11 between decisions, programs, big picture that is of course formed and made by the elite,
12 but when it comes to carrying them out you have to rely on—you need to have the
13 adhesion and the support and the creativity of the grass roots people, including the
14 peasants. So the peasant in the rice fields who can be told to do this or that, but if his
15 heart is not there he'll do it halfway. So from that point of view it was very important
16 and also to consent to the sacrifices and discomforts that those seven programs would
17 require temporarily at least until better days could come. So, the Viet Cong with their
18 emphasis on national independence and national identity and national autonomy in
19 running the country had better chances of appeal.

20 RV: So nationalism was a better-motivated fact without freedom or democracy?

21 JC: Yes. I brought down what we call nationalism. We do all these three areas
22 of self-image, of identity and autonomy and national independence.

23 RV: You told this to the leaders of the workers unions?

24 JC: I told—of course it was—I responded every time that there was a question of
25 the American presence that the presence saw that the explanation was the obvious and
26 they gave them every time about what the American independence was not in
27 contradiction of their aspirations for national independence. It was exactly that, to enable
28 them to have that national independence with freedom.

29 RV: They could go hand in hand.

1 JC: Yes. They could you're right. So but if you compare the chances of appeal
2 to the peasants, to the grass roots between the projection of freedom as a goal and the
3 projection of nationalism as a goal, the appeal of nationalism had better chance.

4 RV: Did you realize this there, when you were there?

5 JC: Yes, indeed.

6 RV: Okay. Were you able to communicate this to your leaders, to your
7 superiors?

8 JC: Oh, very much so.

9 RV: What did they think?

10 JC: Well, when you communicate in the diplomatic way of doing things, you
11 don't get a response. You don't get a response so you hope that that is put in the basket
12 of the variables that go into making decisions. So you should feel happy that you were
13 able to point out that there is that additional variable that must be taken into account in
14 formulating policy and making detailed decisions. So the contact with—I was able to
15 establish warm, working contact with the various trade unions by profession and not so
16 much geographic, but professional. The rubber workers' unions was particularly active.
17 There they had major employers to deal with. There was opportunity for improving of
18 their work conditions and their wages. Therefore there was from one of the more active
19 trade unions of the confederation.

20 RV: So the rubber workers' union was perhaps the strongest and the most active.

21 JC: Perhaps the strongest, yes, yes.

22 RV: How many workers' unions were there?

23 JC: I don't recall exactly, but there were several. There were the civil service.
24 There was the building workers' union. There were the agricultural workers which were
25 separate from the rubber workers' union, the agricultural workers. There were the, oh
26 yes, the garment workers' union, yes, the garments. In that yes, shortly after I arrived I
27 was confronted with a strike of the garment workers' union against a plant that employed
28 if I recall correct something like fifteen hundred workers. It was run, owned and run by a
29 Mr. Jen of Chinese origin, Chinese, his mother. He had come from Taipei, Mr. Jen, J-E-
30 N. There was a strike that had gone on for a few days. Mr. Buu, the head of the
31 confederation, was involved. It must have been within a few weeks after my arrival that I

1 was called upon I felt to intervene in fact, to promote and push for the negotiations
2 between the garment workers' union. Actually at that particular point they were
3 presented directly by Mr. Buu who was the head of the confederation and Mr. Jen. We
4 had long, long sessions, way dark, late in the night. Finally it was settled. Jen made
5 considerable concessions and the strike was settled. We became friends with Mr. Jen.
6 We, interesting enough, we remained in contact through Christmas greetings. Four years
7 ago when we went visiting New Zealand, we stopped in Taipei. The airline had a stop in
8 there about a whole evening. We found Mr. Jen again. He had come, go back to Taipei
9 and was almost an emotional reunion because we had not seen each other since '65, '65.
10 All those years, almost forty years, thirty-five, thirty-seven years and was very—we had
11 meals together. We enjoyed catching up with each other. He had I believe ten children.
12 Only two of them were with them at the time, the rest of them in the United States. Then
13 he moved to the United States. Two years ago we saw him again in the United States, in
14 Los Angeles in Pasadena and died a few months ago.

15 RV: Oh.

16 JC: Yes. He died in 2002, in 2002. Mr. Jen, but we had been in contact with the
17 family.

18 RV: It sounds like you made personal relationships with the leaders of these trade
19 unions.

20 JC: Yes, very close personal relationships. They felt free to call on me any time
21 they wanted and I did the same thing. It was not a counter to—they had people, primarily
22 Mr. Buu who was the personality of the labor movement. So I made sure that I had
23 personal contacts with the leaders of the various unions that constituted the
24 confederation.

25 RV: How much Chinese influence was in the trade union movement?

26 JC: Not very much. Yes, not very much. No, not very much. There were
27 there—I don't recall if a single instance in the literacy of the unions, but there were
28 militants of Chinese origin, but did not constitute a major factor.

29 RV: Okay, okay. Tell me about working with the Vietnamese. Who was your
30 counterpart in the Vietnamese government and how well did you get along and how
31 much give and take?

1 JC: The main counterpart was the minister of labor, yes the minister. There the
2 relationship was very, very good, indeed good. We talked sharp every time we met
3 together except on social occasions, but I made sure that I visited often. On several
4 occasions when they wanted to clarify some matter or to seek some advice about some
5 ideas how to meet certain technical problem, so they would call on me. I will go directly.
6 If it was not for the minister will it be with the director general of the ministry which in
7 effect constituted the number two. Mr. Giang that Ambassador Phung has mentioned on
8 several occasions in his book was in fact my daily counterpart with whom I maintained in
9 contact. He is the one—now is the time to imagine that he urged me from the beginning
10 upon my arrival that we bomb the dykes.

11 RV: Okay, let's talk about that, bombing the dykes. This is a South Vietnamese
12 thing.

13 JC: This is a South (inaudible) Northerner, also career civil servants, very alert,
14 intelligent, sophisticated men, well read, reflective, and soft spoken and wise men with a
15 lot of experience in the government. Here, "If you don't do that," he says, "You lost the
16 battle. There's no other way of doing it."

17 RV: Why did he say this? Why?

18 JC: Why? Because he felt that that's the only thing that will undermine the will
19 of the Viet Cong and of the North, of Hanoi. Second that was the only way to show
20 determination to see this through. When I point out, but that will kill four hundred
21 thousand people, which is the most conservative estimate, "Yes," he says, "But that's
22 life." So if you want to win this battle and if we want to give a message to Hanoi and
23 bring them to the negotiating table, there's absolutely no other way. If you do it the way
24 you're about to go doing it, because now, remember this is '64. So if you do that way,
25 we will take time and time is working for Hanoi and not for you.

26 RV: Hmmm. So destroying the Red River Valley and just wiping out the whole
27 irrigation system.

28 JC: Exactly.

29 RV: Wow. What did you think about this personally? Was this viable?

30 JC: I don't know. I must say I find it unacceptable, unacceptable. I was at the
31 time, when I first arrived I was—well I'm going to call it for better or worse, a hawk. I

1 was in favor of major military effort to confront what was obviously one of the usual
2 communist techniques of subverting another country in this country, South Vietnam. But
3 even hawk as I was and ready to do what it takes to challenge the communistic leagues
4 and the communist monolithic approach to life I could not accept it. I don't think I
5 reported it. I don't think I reported it because undoubtedly in the Pentagon in the review
6 of the possible alternatives and scenarios that could be, notice the bombing of the dyke
7 was considered and probably promptly rejected. But it's characteristic of him. Then I
8 found out that other people when I mention it just to get an idea about the bombing they
9 also, it was supported by other people, by other people.

10 RV: Vietnamese and American?

11 JC: Vietnamese, Vietnamese.

12 RV: Vietnamese. That's very interesting. That's almost—it's total war.

13 JC: America is America. The general was rejection even when I mentioned. I
14 mentioned that the Vietnamese are urging us to do that. It would still be thought
15 unacceptable.

16 RV: I guess looking at hindsight, four hundred thousand people versus two
17 million.

18 JC: Perhaps against five million.

19 RV: Right, or five million, right. What do you do?

20 JC: Exactly, right, exactly.

21 RV: It's easy looking back.

22 JC: Which is the usual argument about the Hiroshima bombing, which is a valid
23 argument. Anybody who tries to argue against is just not appreciating the complexities
24 of life.

25 RV: Let's talk about overall American policy and strategy. What do you think
26 the Americans did wrong and looking back, did you recognize that while you were there,
27 something was not going right and you're right there at the beginning of American, really
28 big time intervention. What could they have done differently?

29 JC: It came down—did I mention here about my meeting with Kissinger?

30 RV: No, you did not.

1 JC: I did not. So my position is directly, as I first formulated in my meeting with
2 Henry Kissinger when he came as professor of Harvard University on a fact-finding
3 mission must have been in the fall of '64 or possibly early '65. I cannot pinpoint the
4 timing, but he was briefed by the embassy, by various people in the embassy, political
5 officers, economic and so forth. The ambassador had the idea, a good idea of course that
6 he should have a briefing by the labor attaché. So Kissinger came to my home with all
7 the other ambassadors. He came to my home and we sat down. We had an hour, an hour
8 and a half discussion but my main point was and remains is that we conceived and
9 advanced the idea of this war in plainer language. We wanted this war more than the
10 South Vietnamese wanted it.

11 RV: You told him that, then?

12 JC: Talking to him about the war against the Viet Cong. So he was startled and
13 he said, "Oh." Then I proceeded to put it in more, more sophisticated terms so that we
14 were taking initiatives. We were taking the place of the South Vietnamese. We were
15 undermining their will to do the things their own way and on their own. I thought that
16 was not the way to do it and were not—it doesn't promise for success in the future. We
17 talked a great deal, but in the end in order to illustrate the point is I mentioned a father
18 who is forcing or making his child eat more than the child wants to eat is in trouble
19 because he's at the mercy of the child. So, I think he—I don't know whether he thought
20 it was a good point or whether he retained it. Nevertheless he never gave me credit for it.

21 RV: So the United States was the Greek mother trying to feed the South
22 Vietnamese child too much?

23 JC: Yes, grandmother.

24 RV: The grandmother right, not the mother.

25 JC: Exactly. You're trying to feed and trying to tell him what is good for him,
26 what is good for him.

27 RV: So the South Vietnamese, do you think they looked upon the United States
28 as that kind of fatherly or motherly or grandfatherly—?

29 JC: Without feeling any resentment, so they would not resent people. If they
30 resented they would express or do something about it. But also they put themselves in
31 the position of an obedient child who somehow was surrendering to that bigger force that

1 knew better what was good for him. It was submission with halfway conviction that
2 perhaps it is so. Perhaps it is so that the big power knows better what is good for us. All
3 these are not at the conscience level, subconscious. So of course there were large
4 numbers of officials and officers and military officers and others who really felt strongly
5 about blocking the communist effort to subvert the country. They were prepared to do it
6 and acting with initiative and with creativity and with resourcefulness, but in the overall
7 picture however it was that intervention of the big power trying to do something that they
8 thought was good for the country without allowing that country to come to that
9 conclusion as a whole, as a country and do the thing that was needed.

10 RV: Do you think that somehow sapped their motivation for self-independence,
11 for seeing this through on their own?

12 JC: It did and mostly I can say it sapped exactly that motivation, but at the same
13 time the dilemma remained. There is an obvious even if in some cases it was
14 subconscious, feeling of contradiction between their presence and their aspiration for
15 independence. So that contradiction was felt, was felt even if it was not articulated. With
16 the Vietcong being there, with their propaganda to point out to that contradiction that
17 never failed to become a factor in people's motivation and people's action. Now, what
18 we could have done better? I think we could have not upheld this, provide resources to
19 the Vietnamese government and say, "Here it is. We promise you to continue the
20 resources if you want to do it, all right, otherwise"—finally as Ambassador Phung has
21 pointed out in his book so well, the *raison d'être* for the Vietnamese government became
22 the presence of the United States. Once the United States left, it felt as though there was
23 no reason for them to have a South Vietnamese government. This is not because of the
24 nature of things, but because of our, the way we acted during the presence, that we knew
25 better, that we were pursuing the interests of the South Vietnam a little bit more
26 aggressively than they were prepared to do it. The minds of many of the people is that
27 this so happened to coincide with the American, with the American perception of their
28 own interests that here was an area, we are doing it. We are expressing the anti-
29 communist campaign and concern that we have throughout the world.

30 RV: Were the South Vietnamese prepared and able after Vietnamization to
31 actually take over the war? Was that a viable policy of the United States?

1 JC: That's the thing. They—it's so complicated. It requires—even if, why after
2 Vietnamization exactly the Vietnamese government did not act with more force, more
3 initiative, more autonomy. Obviously did not act and it culminated with just the final
4 days withdrawing units instead of continuing the game that there was for many years.
5 The Viet Cong will take a village or a city and then the Vietnamese Army would go in
6 and take it back. Then again because he was relying on the Americans to do it. There
7 was never—somehow it never succeeded to—they didn't succeed to take their fate in
8 their own hands and go about it with determination and perseverance. It is inexplicable,
9 except if subconsciously they thought that this was the wrong thing to do and uniting the
10 country and stopping the killing of each other was the noble thing to do and the sooner,
11 the better.

12 RV: Do you feel like the Americans abandoned the South Vietnamese?

13 JC: I don't know. I'm not prepared to go that far. I'm not prepared to go that far.

14 RV: Okay. That's a major argument by a lot of people.

15 JC: By a lot of people it's a major argument. Probably a lot of people South
16 Vietnamese it's a—I am not prepared to go. I think in the end we did the right thing. We
17 saved a little bit of American honor and we departed. We forced the South Vietnamese
18 elite also to take their fate in their own hands. They didn't succeed in doing so. So be it.
19 I don't—I'm not prepared to go that far. Critical as I may be about the American
20 intervention and in retrospect feeling that it was totally unjustified and unwise move, I
21 cannot feel that it was abandoned or that we abandoned the South Vietnamese, no.

22 RV: Did you see during your two years there, the will and fortitude or something
23 within the Vietnamese people that they could survive on their own? Did you see, did you
24 witness this at all, early on?

25 JC: I don't know. I don't know. Whether I saw it or whether I—and yes I did in
26 some respects. I saw that there was a degree, a difference in degree of motivation
27 between North and South that was such that did not bode well for the South, the degree of
28 difference, but that's the trouble with a free society with a democratic system. You don't
29 have the drive. You don't generate the drive, the readiness to act, to respond, to motivate
30 as well as a centrally controlled dictatorial regime. That was in the nature, that there was
31 an unfair competition in terms of motivation. So I don't know. There was the difference.

1 There was a difference. Especially the million people or so that came down from the
2 North after the separation of the two halves, also they were the more virulent and the
3 more articulate, but the genuine subtleness so we're much less off.

4 RV: Okay. Do you think the United States achieved peace with honor in 1973, as
5 was the common phrase used at the time?

6 JC: Yes. I would be inclined to say yes. I would be inclined to say yes. The
7 terms of the agreement of 1973 allow us to say that because did not provide for the
8 surrender of South Vietnam, it provided for opportunity they had two whole years to take
9 hold of the situation and to take hold of their fate and act accordingly. So I would say it's
10 a fair assessment. It was peace with honor, not full honor, but enough to justify the
11 symbolism of the words.

12 RV: Talk to me about the American leadership in Vietnam that you personally—
13 with whom you personally dealt. Westmoreland or the American ambassador, could you
14 make any comments on these individuals?

15 JC: True. Let's begin with the Westmoreland. I have no way of making
16 judgments whatsoever on the military aspects of his leadership, but as a member of the
17 top elite I don't think he was intellectually equipped to face such a major challenge
18 because as a top man of the military he was a member of the team that was running the
19 American effort there. Therefore his function exceeded that of the military operations.
20 He was a member of the group that made policy and formulated the actions that were
21 needed to carry these out successfully. So I think his mental equipment was not up to
22 that. When it came to other than military function he was way above his capacity to
23 grasp and participate. Now, who else? Ambassador Lodge. Ambassador Lodge, as it's
24 well-known Ambassador Lodge has critics. If I were to choose between the supporters
25 and the critics I would line up myself behind the critics.

26 RV: Okay. Why so?

27 JC: I'll leave it at that because it will be too long to try to explain. Ambassador
28 Porter who was the Deputy Ambassador we came here, whom I knew because he was my
29 ambassador in Algiers. I knew him even before then in Morocco. He was an
30 outstanding, extremely capable man, but I think he felt handicapped. First by being the
31 deputy, he had to defer to the number one man. Second he felt that the embassy should

1 be in tune with the thinking of the White House and the aspirations and the hopes and the
2 objectives of the White House although I think—I'm sure that he has never failed to point
3 out the problems and the difficulties and the obstacles and the things that went wrong, but
4 he was a major, major, intellectual force in the thing. The AID (Agency for International
5 Development) was capably run. I forget his name, but the director when I was there, he
6 was a very experienced wise man who saw the AID program as the key program in the
7 civilian dimension of the effort that was undertaken. Who else could I mention?

8 RV: Let's go higher. How about Lyndon Johnson? What are your impressions
9 of President Johnson?

10 JC: Of President Johnson?

11 RV: Did you ever meet him?

12 JC: No, no. Yes, but no, from my lowly position, I felt that—this is more in
13 retrospect, but nevertheless, even at the time—I felt that a lot of his ego got in the way. I
14 think, although he remained lucid at all times, but at the same time he felt that his
15 willpower should move mountains and should come to, should be a decisive factor in
16 handling the situation in Vietnam. As a result he was not very—where is the air
17 conditioning?

18 RV: Right there from that end.

19 JC: Therefore that when confronted with challenges, it was a personal challenge
20 to him. That's about the feelings that I got while I was there, that he knows that he was
21 personally challenged with the difficulties of the thing and of the failures to the extent
22 that they were presented as failures in the struggling South Vietnam. Therefore perhaps
23 his ego got in the way of his judgment at some crucial points.

24 RV: Okay. Do you think President Kennedy if he had lived, would have
25 withdrawn American forces from South Vietnam?

26 JC: I believe so.

27 RV: Why do you think that?

28 JC: I believe he would have done it because he had a different conception of how
29 to meet the communist challenge, that you don't meet it by sending in the troops. He
30 would have appreciated the subtleties and complexities of the South Vietnamese
31 situation. I firmly believe, I have been asked it many times to that question and every

1 time I feel comfortable in predicting or anticipating that he would have withdrawn as he
2 did with the Bay of Pigs. I think a lesser man would not have done what he did, ordered
3 the withdrawal and the termination of the operation in Cuba. I think he was a big enough
4 man and he had a much clearer understanding of how to meet the communist challenge
5 than to rely on troops.

6 RV: Let me ask you about the other two presidents we have not talked about,
7 President Eisenhower. What were your impressions of Dwight Eisenhower?

8 JC: At the time I was disappointed because at—at the time I was disappointed, I
9 felt he was too conservative, too uninspiring.

10 RV: Even as a war hero he was uninspiring?

11 JC: Even as a war hero, exactly. No, I felt that he was uninspiring. Of course
12 every time I saw him making statements his use of the English language was not the most
13 felicitous and for them was an edit. So at the time. In retrospect now with all the books
14 that have been written about it and revealing that he really held the government in his
15 hands, no decisions were made without his personal participation, including Dulles. My
16 view of Eisenhower has improved, but at the time I was deeply, deeply disappointed.

17 RV: Okay. What are your thoughts about Richard Nixon?

18 JC: Ah, Mr. Nixon. Again at the time he was not my favorite. I thought that the
19 “Tricky Dick” adjective that his distractors used so much was an apt one. Of course I
20 was traumatized by the Watergate experience. Really I was traumatized. I thought that
21 sort of thing we cannot possibly tolerate as a behavior on the part of the president of the
22 United States. Therefore, but I gave him a lot of credit for handling China and for getting
23 the peace with the peace with honor with Hanoi. No way of denying him that and the
24 way he evolved and he resurrected himself after his resignation was an honorable one. It
25 restored quite a bit of glitter to his name. He proved himself a very decisive man with
26 ability to—but some of the details that come out of his handling of personal matters and
27 some of his shyness to say nothing of the reports about his drinking are disconcerting, but
28 he definitely has a place in history for better and for worse. But Watergate was really a
29 traumatic experience for the country.

30 RV: Do you have—are there any other comments on your time in Vietnam do
31 you think that we need to discuss?

1 JC: Yes. There is. On visitors, labor leaders, American labor leaders that came
2 to visit and to brief and to see in what ways they can be helpful in the overall effort. This
3 is a good opportunity to pay tribute to one man, Teddy Gleason, the head of the
4 Longshoreman's Association, who also was not enjoying the best of reputations, but he
5 was a powerful man because of the power of his union and his longshoremen. He came
6 on two or three different occasions. I found him a most honorable man. Especially an
7 astute man because he did not come and act as a prima donna that he knew best and he
8 knew it all. No. He came, he put his trust in the labor attaché of the embassy and he
9 didn't make a move without consulting the labor attaché, even down to what he should
10 say in the speeches and who he should meet and how he should handle. It was a
11 remarkable performance of a professional who understood the situation that he couldn't
12 possibly be second guessing the man on the spot. The best he could do was to follow the
13 advice and he did. He was a wonderful visitor and he did a great deal for the
14 longshoremen union of Saigon. He offered money. He offered advice. He offered
15 training facilities and he made a contribution to the extent that everything can be counted
16 and quantified. The other visitor who excelled himself in that respect also was Victor
17 Reuther, the brother of Walter Reuther of the Automobile Workers' Union, legendary
18 figure by the time. Yes, he had died. So Victor would come, another professional trade
19 union leader, again he put the trust in the man on the spot. He acted with considerable
20 dignity and commitment and readiness to learn and follow advice. Later on in my career
21 I had to deal with the opposite behavior of labor leaders who came, especially in France,
22 and they knew it all. They do things the way they wanted. They complain about the
23 things that did not matter, but we handle those too. So that's the only thing I can think of
24 to add.

25 RV: We talked off the record yesterday, I don't know if you remember this, but
26 you said one of the common questions you get from people is where was the best place
27 you served the U.S. government. You told me Vietnam.

28 JC: Good, good. Let's do that. Indeed people when they hear that I have served,
29 let's enumerate, Germany, Geneva, Morocco, Algeria, Beirut, Lebanon with regional
30 responsibilities which extended all the way to Egypt and all the intermediate Arab
31 countries, Vietnam, France, Fiji. So people always prompted the question which country

1 did you like best. For the record it would be interesting to note that it's mostly the
2 French and the Greeks that ask this question because both of them being so venustically
3 inclined and they ask the question with the certainty that I will come up with their own
4 country as the preferred one. But I had to disappoint them first, by saying that it's a
5 difficult question because it so happened that we had enjoyed every assignment and
6 enjoyed and appreciated and admired every country in which we lived. We found
7 positive things, but if they had to insist that that's the game, you have to come up with a
8 name, we come up with the name of Vietnam, to the immense surprise practically of
9 every one, not only the Greeks and the French because they associate Vietnam with the
10 war effort. Therefore how could I possibly choose Vietnam. But that be as it is, when
11 they ask the normal question, often I volunteer to explain it was because of the
12 Vietnamese people. The people I have come to admire and appreciate very much, the
13 quickness of mind, their sense of humor, their hospitality, their hard work. They are
14 absolutely tireless people. Tireless people is the only way to sum up that drive, that
15 energy, the dynamism that these people that perseverance, their capacity to pursue a task
16 to the completion regardless of time and effort and energy that may require. So for all
17 these things Vietnam became our favorite and remains to this day, remains the same. My
18 wife shares that views and I believe although my children were too young to notice, but
19 they have come to appreciate after hearing us repeat it for so many times, but to this day I
20 remain attached to the Vietnamese people and as a result of the country as a whole. Of
21 course we like the tropical fruits of Vietnam including durian that does not enjoy
22 reputation. I just found out from Ambassador Phung that he has durian—he found durian
23 that he would give me to take to my wife, to Tulsa.

24 RV: Really? Wow. Now, the way you just describe the Vietnamese people,
25 would you say that that aided them and assisted them in dealing with the Chinese, dealing
26 with the French and dealing with the Americans in their country? Their tirelessness, their
27 hard work, their motivation, what role did that play in their history, especially in the
28 twentieth century dealing with the French and the Americans?

29 JC: No. I think what is so interest that all those characteristics survived the
30 Chinese, French and American influence. I think that's the important thing, which shows
31 that it's ingrained qualities there that will survive time and any other influences. I think

1 the Vietnamese in that respect will remain, mind you I'm talking about the South
2 Vietnamese. So if it's possible and people do say so that the North Vietnamese are a
3 little bit different, but to the South Vietnamese that I saw in action they were exactly that,
4 as I said, had talent and virtues that are admirable.

5 RV: Would you mind giving us a brief run down of the rest of your career, if
6 possible, like where you went after Vietnam and then?

7 JC: Right. After Vietnam I was assigned to Beirut and Lebanon. That's the—my
8 colleagues in the State Department said the Paris of the Middle East. Indeed it was the
9 Paris of the Middle East at the time, subsequently went through the civil war calamity,
10 but I had regional responsibilities which brought me to the United Arab countries, to
11 Saudi Arabia, to Egypt, to Libya even, and to Qatar.

12 RV: This is while you were in Beirut, you were responsible.

13 JC: While I was in Beirut. So I traveled every so often, every few months. I
14 traveled two months and I get a month. I went for six months in the Arabic school. I
15 learned spoken Arabic, only I didn't learn because the whole course is twenty-two
16 months where you learn to read as well, but in my case they gave me the six month
17 course of speaking. I came out with a working knowledge of the Arabic. I was able even
18 at times to conduct business in Arabic which was pretty good. People thought that was
19 notable. So as a result I had pictured ever since of course situations and physical and
20 political and economic have changed drastically, dramatically, of yes I had responsibility
21 for Yemen. And they all have changed drastically, dramatically. Oh, yes I had
22 responsibility for Yemen. They have changed dramatically now, but at the time I was
23 called to the minister of labor in Qatar who was in a Quonset hut surrounded by dusty
24 roads and environment. Now everything is paved, everything is set. So it was an
25 interesting experience, when that case there were no unions any place. So my counter to
26 them is to brief myself and to get to know their labor policies and the practices for the
27 employers, of the major employers. Then after Beirut, after Beirut, about three years—of
28 course in Beirut we experienced the second evacuation, evacuation of the forces because
29 of the 1967 war between Israel and the Arab countries. The first one being in Saigon
30 when President Johnson asked the families, women and children to leave the country,
31 because in anticipation of terroristic acts on the part of the Viet Cong. So my family

1 chose to go to Bangkok because it was closer. As a result I was able to visit the, oh, on
2 an average about every four or five weeks for a weekend.

3 RV: Where did you go after Lebanon?

4 JC: After Lebanon, Paris.

5 RV: As labor attaché?

6 JC: As labor attaché raisson, as they called me there, they gave it more as a labor
7 consular. I was a labor also and the State Department kept extending my tour without my
8 asking, but without refusing either. Therefore my colleagues there, they were prepared to
9 forgive me for staying seven years, but to have done so without getting into debt to
10 anybody, it was unforgivable. I mention, because of my service in French speaking
11 countries and because of my propensity to meet more people than the labor people also,
12 especially the Generalists and they were French and so forth, people thought when I was
13 in Paris, my colleagues said for the most that it was my second tour because I knew so
14 many people. Indeed, Indeed, I knew so many people from the French speaking posts.
15 Therefore, so after we left Paris in 1977 to go to the War College, I was assigned to the
16 War College. It was while I was in the War College at the beginning of 1978 that
17 President Carter nominated me as ambassador to Fiji. Actually the nomination was
18 inspired by Dick Holbrook, who was Assistant Secretary of Far Eastern Affairs at the
19 time and supported by Peter Townhof and Frank Wiesner who were there in the executive
20 secretaries of the State Department.

21 RV: This is the—you would be the first United States ambassador to Fiji?

22 JC: I was the first United States ambassador resident. Before, it was covered by
23 the ambassador in New Zealand. So there are pros and cons to be the first ambassador
24 because you have to open the embassy and get the routine organized. It was a challenge,
25 but more important is at the time I had regional responsibility also, which accredited,
26 nothing else, accredited to Tuvalu, Kiribati, Vanuatu and Tonga and had consular
27 responsibilities for Tahiti and New Caledonia. At the same time I was the U.S.
28 representative to the South Pacific Commission, which is, the best way to describe it, a
29 little United Nations for the South Pacific, composed of twenty-seven countries, not all
30 independent, but territories also and operates exactly as the United Nations with Annual
31 General Assembly, rotating in this case, with an executive secretariat, with the—yes with

1 the executive secretariat having meetings in between, but the Annual General Assembly
2 was a major event because it brought the South Pacific countries and territories together.
3 There was a difference between my relation with the American territories and the French
4 relation with their territories. My opposite number, the French ambassador, did not allow
5 the French territories to speak on their own and to express their minds, not even if it was
6 in agreement with the French position because this is the theory of the unity of the French
7 state. Therefore you can not speak with two voice or three voices, whereas I allowed the
8 American territories, like the American Samoa to speak up their minds on the issues, on
9 the practical issues, that are under consideration and either agree or disagree with me.
10 My colleague, French colleague, would get terribly upset when the American Samoa was
11 contradicting me because he thought that they may become contentious. New Caledonia
12 or Tahiti will be speaking up, and contradicting the French position. Since then
13 unfortunately it has been changed. There is an American ambassador who comes from
14 the United States. He resides in the United States as a representative of the South Pacific
15 Commission. The representation of the other South Pacific islands had been divided
16 between New Zealand and Suva. I think the break up made considerable more sense for
17 the ambassador to Suva to be holding both positions of ambassador to Suva and the other
18 nearby islands and the South Pacific Commission.

19 RV: Right. How long were you there doing this?

20 JC: I was there two and a half years.

21 RV: Okay, so 1981?

22 JC: No, no end of 1980.

23 RV: 1980. Okay.

24 JC: Then I was required to retire because the retirement limit was sixty at the
25 time and about two or three months later legislature extended it to sixty-five.

26 RV: So you went back to work?

27 JC: No.

28 RV: You did not.

29 JC: No, I did not.

30 RV: You stayed retired.

31 JC: I had retired. I had no way of going back.

1 RV: Were you disappointed?

2 JC: I was.

3 RV: Or were you ready to retire?

4 JC: No, I was not ready to retire. No, I must say I was not ready to retire and I

5 was disappointed. But in retrospect it was a wise thing to do because if I had not retired I

6 don't think we would have gone through the experience in Greece of building a house

7 and having a house there. Life would have taken different—but we would have retired in

8 France because the house there is quite nice, so.

9 RV: How do you want people to remember John Condon?

10 JC: As a hard working, committed, civil servant. I think that's—and I claim that

11 perhaps it would be a good way to, a right way to remember.

12 RV: Do you have anything else that you'd like to comment upon?

13 JC: No, no. I know that this is the place, but I want to be on record in every place

14 I can of admiration and appreciation for what the Vietnam Center is doing. I want that to

15 be the truth and I'll seek every opportunity to do so, propagate that as with all my energy

16 that I can and with all the people that I'll meet from now on.

17 RV: Okay, very good. Well, this will end the oral history interview with Amb.

18 John Condon. Thank you very much sir.

19 JC: Thank you very much, Richard. You have been a good questioner.