The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Barry Zorthian
Conducted by Richard B. Verrone, Ph.D.
July 25, 27; August 8, 21, 22; September 1, 20, 27; October 2, 13; November 8, 2006
Transcribed by Mindy Moser

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm conducting an oral history interview for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project. I am talking with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is July 25, 2006. It is approximately 9:44 AM Central Standard Time, 10:44 AM Eastern Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock, Texas in the Vietnam Archive's interview room on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Zorthian is in his home in Washington, DC. Barry, before we begin we discussed very briefly off-record just about the process of the interview and how we would conduct this and that also by doing the interview you understood that this was going to be donated to the Vietnam Archive to become part of your collection and open to the public and open to the public would mean and will mean a draft and an audio and a final transcript here physically here in the archive for people to see in Lubbock, Texas, but also an audio and a transcript version that will be digital and up on the internet in the Virtual Vietnam Archive and before we go forward if you could just let me know you're okay with that.

Barry Zorthian: Yes, I am. I understand that. I also assume that if I should ever want to use portions of this interview in any writing I do, a book or anything else—I have no current plans to but if I should decide to I have access to it and the right to use it myself.

RV: Absolutely. This interview, the copyright belonging to the Vietnam Archive simply allows us to "publish" it and put it up onto the Internet and that's it. This is making it part of the public domain out there where anybody can use it, of course including yourself. So if you're okay with all of that we'll move forward.

BZ: Yeah, fine.

RV: Okay. Well, Barry, why don't we start back in the beginning? I would like you to tell me a little bit about your childhood, what you remember, first of all starting with where you were born and when you were born and going from there.

BZ: Well, I was born in a town in Turkey, what is now the Republic of Turkey, called Kutahya, K-a-t-a-h-y-a, near Bursa, not too far from Istanbul and near the Eskishehir where the U.S. currently has quite an airbase. In any event, the son, the third son, a sister pre-deceased me, to, Annaly, Mar Karian, and Hampartsoom Zorthian. Typical Armenian family in the Ottoman Empire. Father born in 1885, mother in 1886, father was a businessman but more accurately a writer. The local terms called him an intellectual. Mother was a Protestant daughter of a congregational minister, Father was Armenian Apostolic. Father had been deported by the Turks in the genocidal period. He actually, in 1916, he's written about that, a book. He was in exile for three years, mostly in Aleppo in Syria. Very hard time. I originally had his book translated into English and issued as a limited edition but when the World War I sort of ended he came back to Kutahya. I was born subsequently; my two older brothers were born before he was exiled. But then things started turning troublesome again. I was born October 8, 1920, came up with a lot of Turks, we had later resurgence of Turkish power, Father went into hiding again, Mother was in jail. One of the family legends or stories is I was in her arms in jail at a very young age but the family finally decided to leave Turkey and we worked our way, obviously I was a baby and just a passenger, but worked our way to Istanbul. Again, family story, escaping Turkish detention by the children being in huge baskets in the other side of donkeys, covered by fruit. We got through the lines and into Istanbul. After a short period in Istanbul—during which I've still got some pictures, family pictures—the family was off to Athens and after about six months there—I think we left Istanbul in 1921—off to Italy where we lived for a year in the city of Padua, having applied for visas to come to the United States. In 1923 those visas arrived. We traveled to Cherbourg, came to the U.S. on August 23, 1923. Nice little story about that. At that time the U.S. Congress had passed the law putting restrictions on immigration and the law was designed such that it favored the sort of North European immigrants against the South European residents who were not quite in favor in a largely Anglo-Saxon United States. But in any rate that law was to go into effect with the new quotas imposed on

August 23, 1923. The captain of the Kennard Liner suddenly realized that all those immigrants he had down in steerage might be turned back and he may have to take them back across the Atlantic to Paris and he decided to make a bold move. He shifted course and went into Boston instead of Ellis Island, got there just before the new law went into effect. So we landed through Boston, not Ellis Island.

RV: That's very interesting. Can we go back just a bit to Turkey? Do you remember or have any kind of memories about your time there at all? You're very, very, very young.

BZ: No, not really. Obviously from family conversations, memories are created but directly, no. My father ran in Kutahya what in the U.S. would be called a department store. He was a businessman but obviously in local terms not quite what we would imagine as a department store. Kutahya was a town known for two things, one, ceramics. Historically they were the other center of ceramic development in Turkey. Izmir was the other one. Of course Izmir Blue. Furthermore, one of the most famous Armenian Church leaders, Catholicos, the equivalent of the pope in the Armenian Apostolic Church, was born in Kutahya. He was a great musician. He finally, under the Turkish pressures of the late nineteenth century, lost his mind, but nevertheless as I say, Kutahya was known for that. We've been back there. I went there in 1956, took a chance all alone. I was working for the Voice of America then on a world trip; saw the area where my family had had a home. That home had long since gone, saw the Armenian Church which had been turned into a garage. At one point there were ten thousand Armenians in Kutahya. By the time I got there in '56 there may have been five families, all of whom had taken Turkish identity and lived a very, very secluded, fearful, fearful life still. Then my wife and I went back there in the mid-nineties. We drove from Istanbul down. We had a better visit. Kutahya was sort of emerging, the business was there, the ceramics and handicraft factories had been turned into modern producers of China.

RV: Okay. When you arrive in Italy, do you remember any of that and your travels up to England?

BZ: No. Remember, I'm still under three years old and so no, not really. Italy, again—based on family conversation—was very important in the formative development of my older brother who became a well established artist in his time. My father would

take him around to the museums of Europe and obviously particularly Italy and at that age he must have been nine or ten or something like that. He was very impressed—it made a great impression on him and led to his development of natural talents for art. But no, the family talked about it around our dinner table and so I catch a lot of those stories but on a personal basis no memories yet. My first real memories are in New Haven, Connecticut.

RV: What did your family tell you about Cherbourg and kind of the gathering of immigrants waiting to leave and to come to the United States?

BZ: Well, getting a visa to the United States was even then a somewhat difficult thing and one of the reasons we were able to get it was my mother had a married sister who preceded her to the U.S. and they in effect sponsored our family. Not too long ago a friend of mine went back through the records and I have the entries for our family in 1923, the registration and coming through Boston. They spelled the name wrong but the last name Zorthian was fine.

RV: What do you know about your family history going back, your father's parents and so forth?

BZ: Father's parents, very little. Father, in his book, talks about his mother and his father but more emphasis on his mother who evidently was very, very strong willed, a very tough minded woman. His father left sort of and not a ne'er do well but not quite as active in working. He was a very good student. My father taught himself. At the end he knew French, some English obviously, living in the U.S., plus Armenian, plus Turkish. Mother's family came from the southern part of Turkey in the Adana/Aintab areas where there were large Armenian communities, a number of whom had converted to Protestantism. You know, in the late 1890s when New England missionaries spread around the world, among the places they went was Turkey to convert those heathen Muslims. But the Turks in effect said, "Not us. Go get the Armenians." The Armenians were largely apostolic and independent church, officially independent but everyone else with their own hierarchy. And what the missionaries had to offer the Armenians was education. A number of well-known Middle Eastern American-initiated educational institutions came out of that like Roberts College. My mother spent a year I think at Roberts College. She was the daughter of a congregational minister who finally went to

Aintab. The Mar Karians, my mother's family, were very widespread. There were Mar Karians all over the world. The Armenian ambassador to the U.S. is a Mar Karian whose family two or three generations back came out of Turkey, I think.

RV: Okay.

BZ: I had relatives who didn't speak Armenian. The Armenians had been in that area so long they spoke Turkish even though they were self-identified Armenians.

RV: Were you taught English only when you arrived over in the United States or was this something that your family began earlier?

BZ: No, I was taught after I came to the U.S. My mother spoke English reasonably well because of that educational background. Father knew very little English although he learned, obviously. He knew Armenian and Turkish and French. In fact he used to translate French books into Armenian at one point. But no, my English came in the U.S. Again, as I say, in 1923 I wasn't quite—my birthday is October eighth and we landed in August so I wasn't quite three years old. I don't remember. I may have picked up a word or two of English but I certainly didn't speak it.

RV: Your first memories, are they of the United States?

BZ: Oh yeah.

RV: Okay. Tell me about how your family got set up here upon arriving in Boston.

BZ: Incidentally, let me make clear though for many years since 1953 when I changed it legally, I've been known as Barry. My name all through school, college, law school, Marine Corps and right through getting in the New York bar was Barooyr, B-a-r-o-o-y-r. It's a very honorable Armenian name. My parents named the three boys after historic and ancient Armenian kings. My sister who died prematurely before I was born of diphtheria and as a result of my mother passing up medicine for another sick child, again a family story—

RV: Tell me about Boston and either what you remember—

BZ: I don't remember a thing honestly about Boston. In later years I obviously got there quite a bit and knew a little Boston, but no, not in that period. And as far as I am aware we didn't spend any time in Boston. At least I've never heard the family or the parents talk about it. We went right to New Haven.

RV: Okay. Why did you all take of straight for New Haven?

BZ: Well, because that's where our sponsors, Mother's sister and her family, were, named Vartanian.

RV: Can you spell that for the transcriptionist?

BZ: V-a-r-t-a-n-i-a-n.

RV: Okay. And so these folks that sponsored you, this is what helped you all get your visas?

BZ: That's right. You have to have U.S. sponsors for immigrants; at least it was necessary for our visas. Now, Mother's family—I'm not sure how long they had been here but they were established, her sister. We got a place I remember, a very modest place on Orchard Street in New Haven and I do have some very hazy memories of that. Ultimately we moved into the part of New Haven known as Westville and lived two or three different places—two different places at least—on Whalley Avenue in Westville and then in due time the family bought a house on Emerson Street in Westville and that's really where I grew up. Father had a chance—which he always regretted—of joining with some other Armenians who were here in initiating a candy company that ultimately developed Peter Paul Mounds.

RV: Oh wow.

BZ: He never took part in it, unfortunately. (Laughs) Friends did. Peter Paul Mounds built a big place in north Connecticut and the founding three or four Armenians because quite wealthy. Some of them were close friends of ours. Father instead was an independent type. He started a business, bought an existing business cleaning and drying, which was then on Whalley Avenue, Edgewood Cleaners, and that's the livelihood my parents had for our family and I used to spend a lot time around there.

RV: Exactly what kind of business was that?

BZ: Dry cleaning suits. Dry cleaning was a fairly expensive and low-end in terms of the dollars of that day. It was fairly expensive then. Dry cleaning suits, pressing, and Mother would do a lot of sewing. I remember she had an old Singer sewing machine from the store but Father and Mother both worked. Mother was the driver. Father never learned the drive. Mother was the driver and suits would be cleaned and pressed and sewed if necessary and Mother would drive them around in the neighborhood. In

Westville was where most of our customers were. But the back room of that store was also a sort of gathering place for Armenians. Mother had other relatives in town. They'd come by, she'd do some cooking back there and it was a sort of little community center. I'd spend a lot of time—my older brothers being older were off in their room or at school. We were members of the Westville Congregational Church where Father, despite his being Apostolic Armenian, would go to that church. They were part of the congregation there. I went to Sunday school there, my brothers were there and my middle brother used to play basketball at church. It was part of the community. I went to three schools in that area, the Mary Frances Benton Grammar School, now physically gone; Susan S. Sheridan Junior High School, literally across the street from our house on Emerson Street; and then New Haven High School where I'd sometimes walk. It was two or three miles into the center of New Haven, or I'd sometimes take a trolley. The trolley was ten cents. Sometimes we'd walk just to save that ten cents. This was the height of the Depression. There wasn't much money around. But that education was great for me. I worked hard at it. I used to play enough but also delivering newspapers, magazines, they had a *Colliers* magazine route, I had a *Saturday Evening Post* route and then I used to deliver the *New Haven Register* to homes in the Westville—we were on the wrong side of the tracks. On Fountain Street, there was the dividing line. We were lower middle class and then it went down into the so called valley. The other side of Fountain Street was the middle class and in those terms an affluent neighborhood. Our store's customers were there, my paper route was there. But junior high school, the students I was in junior high school with was a mixer for the two. It had both categories of students in there. But those were the early years. They were good years. I remember them very fondly. My brother was in high school, my older brother. As I said to you in an earlier conversation he was a classmate with Walt Rostow who later became well known in regard to the Johnson administration. And my middle brother, who was a much gentler soul than either one of us, older or the youngest, was there, too. My middle brother ended up in the 1930s at the University of Illinois. He got a journalism degree but never went into journalism. He had a business. We seemed to start businesses. My older brother was an artist and made a living out of it, married, and ultimately made it to California.

RV: How much older were they, Barry?

BZ: Well, my middle brother was six years older and my older brother was about nine years older.

RV: Okay.

BZ: Eight or nine depending upon the time of year. I remember, and I've got it in my fingertips so I have records, my oldest brother was born in 1911 and my middle brother was born I believe in 1914 and I was born in 1920 and in between we had a sister.

RV: Right. Were your brothers really large influences on you?

BZ: Oh yeah, but since I was so much younger we didn't grow up in a normal sibling relationship. They were on to high school and so on before I even got out of grammar school. But they were always there. We were close in a sense that the family was close.

RV: Could you elaborate on that? You've talked about—you've described your home but I'm really curious about the traditions and the heritage that your parents brought and kept within your household and within your community.

BZ: Well, one, my parents kept a very close eye. My brother being an artist, almost bohemian—in fact in the last years of his life he was known as the last of the bohemians in Pasadena, California—but he was very often on his own. But even he—a great tradition was Sunday dinner together. Traditional Armenian dishes of pilaf and chicken and yogurt and so on. But conversation around the dinner table and my father was very, very insistent on that kind of family tie, which my older brother didn't always hold but it held enough to where it was a close family.

RV: Did you participate in or hang around the back of the shop where the locals would gather?

BZ: Oh yeah. Not the locals, the Armenian locals. Not the neighbors. The neighbors were all kinds, but yeah, very much so. And I would go on vacation. My father was great for vacations. We would take motor trips, my mother driving, particularly after we bought a Graham-Paige, which was one of the cars of the thirties. We went out to the Midwest. I remember we attended Armenian Day celebration. Father was a great Armenian nationalist. He wrote for Armenian newspapers under the pen name Arnak. He would give talks at Armenian meetings. The Chicago World Fair of 1932 and '33, he insisted we go out there. We went out, we saw my middle brother's

eventual University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and then in Illinois we went to Chicago for Armenia Day. I remember, what was I then, twelve years old, so I'm standing up on a chair and waving an Armenian nationalist flag. Armenia was then under Soviet control and the country of Armenia was a Soviet Republic. But we would travel a lot. I remember visits all over the northeastern U.S., Niagara Falls, Canada, Midwest, Cleveland, and in some of them were Armenian communities where my family had contacts or friends. And so I was very close, very much prior to my parents wandering around in their social life. You didn't have babysitters very much in those days. I'd go with my parents to a dinner or to a party, a kep it's called in Armenian, and if I got tired they'd put me in a bedroom and I'd sleep until the party was over and they'd wake me up and take me with them. But it was a classic American lower-middle class life.

RV: And you saw yourself growing up as American but Armenian-American?

BZ: Of course. There was no hesitation or embarrassment of being Armenian.

RV: Right. Did you all experience any kind of discrimination that you remember or that your parents might have spoken about?

BZ: Yeah, there was some here and there. Particularly in schools it wasn't a real problem. Sure, I remember. There are certain things you start remembering from childhood. I remember one of my neighbors with British background still had pictures of the king and queen and a little bit later became a good friend saying once, "Well, my parents say if you don't like it here you should go back where you came from." That sort of thing. But we had a mixed neighborhood, a French family that was ethnically French, Jewish, British, Armenian of course, American in the sense of Anglo-Saxon background, so we got along. Now, if you went over to the other side of the tracks there probably was more, "Who are these foreigners around here?" But it wasn't too bad. It wasn't something we'd be conscious about. It wasn't something you would demonstrate about. So in high school I remember I was up for membership in a fraternity and at the last moment I was told that I couldn't become a member because I wasn't Catholic. It wasn't that I was Armenian it was that I wasn't Catholic and the fraternity was Catholic. So you got that kind of thing but no, I was active in my class activities, in junior high school I was president of the travel club I remember, I was treasurer of my home room, so it was acceptable. Socially it wasn't close but we'd have friends of all types, or I would in

school. And in high school there was absolutely none at all. I was very, very active in high school, won a lot of prizes, voted the most brightest, voted the most versatile, voted the most active or whatever it was, most popular. But that kind of thing. So sure, there may have been subtle—I've run into some discrimination over the years but very little of it apparent. Now whether certain things were denied because of some hesitation about being Armenian or not, I don't know. Most discrimination I've known about and faced was because of being active in Vietnam. Never went anywhere after Vietnam.

RV: Barry, can you tell me about New Haven and what you remember that small town being like?

BZ: Well, New Haven was a classic old New England town. At that time in the thirties it was one of the two prominent cities in Connecticut, Hartford and New Haven about equal in size. Hartford had the state government. I've forgotten the exact population. If I remember and I could be off, both of them had about a hundred and sixty thousand people. New Haven was a port and Yale University had a number of industries, the sergeant arms and armaments of Winchester and so on. Hartford had the insurance companies so they were competitive in that sense. New Haven had the element around the University, the academics, the faculty, the students obviously. Hartford didn't have that kind of academic core but it had its own community college and so on. And Connecticut was a good place to live. We were in the New York City orbit but not really integrated. We were almost more further away than the Boston orbit. The Yankees weren't as popular as the Red Sox and that kind of thing. But no, I think in many ways I had a great upbringing and fortunately in New Haven and most fortunate of course because Yale University had a number scholarship programs, Sterling scholarships earmarked for New Haven students and I was fortunate enough at one point to win one of those.

RV: Okay. Well, I'd like to talk about your education there in New Haven. You've already touched on it a bit but could you describe basically early on what kind of student you were and your attitude towards school and learning and did you see it more as a academic endeavor or a social or athletic or the whole thing combined?

BZ: Well, I was never an athlete. I ruled that out. I made a couple of tries at it but didn't get very far. No, school was, to me, the road to becoming American, to

becoming integrated. Grammar school ended up early. You know, I recently went to my sixty-fifth reunion at Yale, class of 1941, and one of the people there was a fellow named Jerome Heyman, now Haden, from California, a doctor. He and I started grammar school together in nineteen—what could it have been, ’25 or ’26? And we both skipped a grade together, I’ve never forgotten, in Mary Frances Benton Grammar School. I remember we had a little modest little mimeograph paper at Benton and I worked on that, as did Jerry. We used to be pretty good friends. Then in high school again those were the days when in high school you’d have college avenue classes and commercial avenue classes, target classes. I was in the college and my parents always insisted we were all going to college, which we did. But I was in that which tended to be more of the more affluent elements of the school and tended to be more WASPish, if you will, but got along fine. Little bit of social activity, visiting each other’s homes, friends who were—Seaver Smith, a doctor’s son, a good friend, Russ Warner, people who lived on the other side of Fountain Street. As I said earlier I was treasurer of my class and president of the travel club. The reason I know these things was in going back to the sixty-fifth I did a little research knowing I’d see some of the people from that period. High school was again—and in all of these I got very good grades. In high school I got a number of academic prizes. As I said, I was voted the brightest in the class, saw straight As, maybe a B here or there or an A minus but that kind of thing. Very active in all kinds of clubs, one of the co-managers of the basketball team, class day chairman, etc, etc, and all under the name of Barooyr, I’ve got to remind you, which isn’t the easiest thing in the world. And I was in the Boy Scouts. I went to summer camp at Camp Sequassen in northwestern Connecticut. First the Boy’s Club camp at Camp Clearwater in New Haven and then Camp Sequassen for five years as a counselor following my older brother who was craft counselor there because he was an artist. I became craft counselor but I had a wonderful summer. Those Boy Scout years were just great. So it was very remunerative, not in terms of money but in terms of experience and taking part in mainstream, at least at the educational level, America.

RV: Right. It certainly sounds that way. Did you parents emphasize education and you all going to school?

BZ: Oh, absolutely. There was never any question that we had to go to college. Armenians striving for education is very real and my mother with her educational

background, my father with his "intellectual character" would always emphasize that. I went to Yale, my middle brother went to University of Illinois, my older brother went to Yale Art School, so education was always an assumption. We were going to college period.

RV: Can you tell me about you growing up and then in high school before Yale, about how you were socially? How would you describe yourself?

BZ: Well, my social attractions and activities were limited. I was not that established a family but they were all right. I had friends. We'd see each other. I worked on the high school newspaper, *The Sentinel*, wrote a sports column. I got into sports writing and I was the sports editor of our high school newspaper and there developed friends. Art Merwin was the chairman; Lou Harris who would later found Harris Research and was close to the Kennedy's was one of the editors. We became good friends. It wasn't quite the, what shall I say, not limited to but what would be labeled a WASP (White Angle-Saxon Protestant) social circles but then because of Westville and where we lived, sure we had friends there. But the social side was more limited than the school activities side, which were normal.

RV: Why do you think that was? What was the reason?

BZ: Well, I think because of my ethic origins, I think I didn't have the money that some of these families had, I think in high school you have various categories or levels if you will socially. I was not socially at the top level but it was all right. I never felt like a second grade citizen. It was fun except for that one incident that I told you about the fraternity. And there were in high school, and we're talking about the thirties, seventy years ago. Things were different then. For instance, we had very few African-Americans in high school. There was an African-American black community in New Haven but a lot of those kids didn't even go to high school. They dropped out before. I had some friends, our basketball team that I helped manage, I can't think of a single black American in it. It was a different world. That world is gone. At Yale in our freshman year, well all through, we didn't have a single black American. Those were the days where you had waitresses in the Yale dining room and "biddies" to clean your room and make the fireplace and straighten up your bed and so on.

RV: Right. Barry, what were your hobbies?

BZ: I'm not sure I had any real hobbies. I was so busy with the newspaper route. In high school I started writing for the local newspaper, *The New Haven Register* as a high school sports writer. I would make ten cents a column inch. Saturdays I would go into the assistant sports editor named Bill Lush. Dan Murphy was sports editor. I'd pull out the articles I had written that had run in the paper and then Bill would measure them and then he'd give me a voucher which I would take down to the cashier. Twenty-six inches a copy, ten cents a column inch, you get two dollars and sixty cents. At one time, Bill, out of the goodness of his heart, gave me a by-line, "By Barooyr Zorthian." For some reason they'd been short. I got out of my typical usual mold of high school sports and I covered the dog show at the New Haven Arena. I didn't know a hoot in hell about dog shows but I learned awfully fast. Six classes and so on. At any rate, I wrote the story and the article appeared by Barooyr Zorthian. CD Jackson who owned the *New Haven Register* was an old curmudgeon New England Yankee type and said, "No one named Barooyr is going to have a by-line in my newspaper," and I didn't get another by-line for many, many years. But with all that I really did not have that many recreations. Sometimes in the younger years since the Sheridan Junior High School yard where you could play ball was right in front of our house I'd go out there and play with the other fellows in the neighborhood, but I was never an athlete. My middle brother, Vahe, was a much better athlete than I was. But no, no, I just didn't have those physical skills.

RV: Okay. As you were growing up and getting older were there chances and opportunities for you to date and to go out with girls or just experience that side of the social scene or again were you still—?

BZ: Very limited, very limited I must say. The natural thing was Armenian girls, there weren't many in New Haven. While I knew some because of family connections I never really had any relationship or any dating with anyone. With others, probably, and I hesitate to say this, but probably because of the ethnic background if you will, the WASPs or certainly the Jewish ones would have been hesitant in dating an Armenian. But I didn't have that particularly. I wasn't particularly aggressive. I don't remember any little bit, little bit of sort of group dating in high school but I never got tied in with any individual and certainly never close to, "This is my boyfriend and this is my girlfriend," type of thing.

RV: Okay. I'd like to ask you about a couple of things to do with education. What did you consider your strengths as far as your intellectual skills? Was it writing or was it kind of an aggressive intellectualism if you will? How would you characterize yourself in that manner?

BZ: Well my father was a writer first and foremost, even though he was running a dry cleaning and pressing shop. His real, if you will, mindset and profession was writing. And I tended—my father was a great hero to me, a great model, and I wanted to be a writer so I was on the Benton school paper. I was on the Sheridan Junior High School paper, I wrote a sports column for the *New Haven High School Sentinel*, I competed for the *Yale Daily News* and ended up being an editor there and a sports writer so writing in that sense was the attraction, the thing that attracted me. I majored in international relations in college and I was always interested in foreign affairs, then because of family background. I remember once one of my great professors was what was his first name? His last name was Dunn, Hugh Dunn. He had been ambassador to Germany and after one of the classes I had Harry Rudin and Arnold Wolfors and Nicholas Spykman. These were all legends in the faculty at Yale besides the Chauncey Tinkers and William Phelps. But I asked Dunn afterwards, I said, "I want to go into international affairs. What are the odds for me, Barooyr Zorthian, in the Foreign Service?" He said, "Well, no one named Barooyr Zorthian is going to become an ambassador of the United States." I said, "That's a very honest answer." So that deflected my attention and my interest level and pushed me more towards journalism. I never ended up as a foreign correspondent. It just didn't work out that way. I think I would have been a pretty good one, actually, but so be it. It ended up to where in one way or another, one side of the fence or the other, my focus became writing, news writing, or media relations. And that was fine. That satisfied most of my interest and ambitions.

RV: Did you parents, or I guess more specifically your father, did they want you to go into the family business or into any certain area?

BZ: No, not at all. No, no, not at all. They were workers and they wanted their sons to get into professional fields and so forth. And they died early. Mother died in 1948. Father died in 1953. We saw him off on a ship, I forgot what line it was, probably Cunard, but he went back to Aleppo where he'd spent his three difficult years in exile and

he died in a hotel in Aleppo. He's buried in Aleppo. Mother is buried in New Orleans. Now, my brother has a suspicion of why Father died, whether there was any outside influence on him but I think it was just the emotions of those three horrible years he spent in Aleppo but no, they would not have wanted me to go into business in any way. Vahe, my middle brother, had a business instinct that was very good. He founded a taxicab company in New Orleans. His son is running it and working very well.

RV: Okay. Barry, why don't we go ahead and take a break and stop for today?

BZ: No, that's fine.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 2 of 11
July 27, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history interview for the Vietnam Archive's Oral History Project with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is July 27, 2006. It's approximately 10:15 AM Central Standard Time. Barry is in Washington and I am in Lubbock again. Barry, let's pick up with your entry into Yale University. Tell me about the process of getting in and getting to that university. Was it set that it was going to be Yale or was there something else out there on the horizon?

Barry Zorthian: Well, I never applied to anywhere else. Fortunately for residents of New Haven, Yale has a number of scholarships for New Haven students. I think they're called Sterling Memorial scholarships. As usual, I spent the summer as a counselor at Camp Sequassen Boy Scout Camp. By then I was crafts—no, I guess not by then. I was assistant crafts counselor and one of the camp counselors at the individual camps there. My brother was still there, I believe. But at any rate, in the middle of the summer I got the fat envelope of both acceptance at Yale and the granting of a four-year scholarship so there was never an issue of going elsewhere. That four-year scholarship trailed me all the way through Yale. My first two years I was a true townie. Students who lived at home and went to Yale were called townies. I still lived on Emerson Street. By then I would jump on a bicycle to get to classes and so on. And for two years I lived at home and went to school at Yale. I was determined to get into the full campus life and so my junior and senior years I applied for and was given what are called bursary jobs. My junior year I lived in Davenport College and I wrote sports releases on intramural sports. My senior year a new college opened up called Silliman and I was athletic secretary there and that gave me room and board. So I went through Yale. As I keep saying I guess somewhat apocryphal I guess accurate. I started Yale with twenty-five bucks in the bank and when I left I had five hundred dollars in the bank and all my bills were paid. But that five hundred dollars came from the *Yale Daily News*, which used to distribute its advertising profit after expenses to its senior board members. I heeled the *Yale Daily News* in the first competition that was available and I was still living at home. I did not make it then but in the fall of my sophomore year I heeled it again and did make

it. We had a great board. The chairman of our class was Kingman Brewster who later became president of Yale. The vice-chairman was Bill Jackson, the son of Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson. He and Kingman were classmates and then a very good roster of people. That was one of my entries into the traditional Yale life, being a member of the news board. I ended up in my junior/senior year writing a sports column. You notice I didn't make much comment on my academic.

RV: Well, I'm going to ask you about that. (Laughs) Tell me about the academics.

BZ: It was not very high. I spent so much of my energy on various Yale activities, extracurricular, like the news, like various committees and so on, just to participate, and I must say probably neglected my academics which never got over a C or a B average. I suppose I could have done better. The scholarships, Sterling Memorial Scholarships were awarded in anticipation of a good academic record. Mine was not the best. It was probably at the end that what was called a gentleman's C then.

RV: (Laughs) What were you favorite courses and topics of study?

BZ: Well, there's no doubt. We had a great, great international relations faculty, some outstanding people in the history faculty and that was the area that interested me the most. Frederick Dunn and Nicholas Spykman and Arnold Wolfers, all academic stars in this particular field. That's where I was aiming to either get into journalism or Foreign Service. The Foreign Service part sort of receded when one day after class I went up to Professor [Dunn] and said, "I'm interested in going to Foreign Service. What do you think?" And he was very kind, very sympathetic and he said, "Look, I don't think anyone named Barooyr Zorthian is going to get very far in our foreign service." So I sort of put that aside and he was absolutely right. That was the old Foreign Service, the old eastern-establishment foreign service. Many, many years later the Foreign Service started the diversification minority representation and so on. But that was too late for me.

RV: So what was it about that topic that really attracted you? You had great professors.

BZ: I guess my ethnic background, the family's interest in international affairs by growing out of our origins, you know, that sort of thing, my father's interest in foreign affairs and so on. That was the sort of thing that was attractive to me combined with my

interest in writing. I had visions of being a great foreign correspondent where it seemed to me there were opportunities. I never had any desire that so many Yale people of that era had, going into finance, going into advertising, going into banking, even going into law. I had occasional thoughts about law but simply as a channel to getting into the international relations field.

RV: Right. Was that not let's say as sexy as going into law or going into economics and all that, kind of being a foreign correspondent or in a journalism type of career?

BZ: Well, the law aspect really grew after World War II when I got out. Journalism was what I was interested in. My high point at Yale I guess came in junior year. I had been active in many, many organizations and I was tapped and tap was literally the word then, the last tap-day in Yale history. I was tapped for Skull and Bones and that again, to someone with my background was a great, great step forward and I guess in many ways was one of the most influential associations in my life.

RV: Tell me why.

BZ: Pardon me?

RV: Can you tell me why?

BZ: Well, simply that it put me—because Skull and Bones was so much at the core of the Yale life of that day, the Yale ethos of that day, that it put me into that thing. Rather than being a townie or on the fringes of the class from podunk high school and so on it put me right into the middle of what in those days was still a prep school, Northeastern prep school dominated community. And I enjoyed it. There's no doubt that I became part of it and it has continued to be a factor of varying degrees of influence throughout my life, my fifteen club mates.

RV: Barry, how did that happen? How were you selected? Do you know why?

BZ: No, I do not because those deliberations are secret. When we selected the next club it was very sort of restrained, I guess. I must say, one reason I was selected, that year on Tap Day you'd get tapped on the shoulder and you'd say, "Skull and Bones. Do you accept?" And if you didn't accept you'd turn it down. Well, those clubs consisted of fifteen people. That year had the greatest number turned down ever because there was a campus reaction against secret societies. Among those who turned it down

was Kingman Brewster and a number of other people I knew because of my *Daily News* involvement. Fourteen turndowns, so that meant fourteen out of our fifteen eventual members may have been, you never know, may have been second choices and I have no doubt in my mind I was on the list, down the list. If those fourteen had accepted I probably would not have been. But in Skull and Bones mythology, the upper power makes the right choice and those fourteen properly turned it down and the fifteen who were selected were the chosen.

RV: Okay. Is there anything that you can tell me about the society without breaking any of the—

BZ: No. There have been a lot of books written but beyond this discussion I would not comment, certainly on the internal things. It did make and lead to many contacts and friendships over the years with people who were members. I remember debating John Kerry, for instance, once after I came back from Vietnam and we were both at a society meeting. He was Skull and Bones, George W. Bush was Skull and Bones, George W. Bush's father, Herbert Walker, was Skull and Bones, his grandfather, Prescott Bush, was Skull and Bones, Henry [Luce] who was founder of *Time* magazine, and lots and lots of others. But the only reason I feel free to even talk about being in it is that my membership in it was reported in *Time* magazine so there was nothing secret about that. Well, the membership was not secret. It's printed in the class book and so on.

RV: Sure. Did it cause a problem for you when it was published in *Time*?

BZ: No, no, *Time's* closing paragraph of that whole *Time* magazine style was the legend of Skull and Bones is it annually elects thirteen big men on campus, one unknown and one Armenian. And this year got its Armenian, newsman Barooyr Zorthian.

RV: (Laughs) So when you were debating Kerry that was about Vietnam?

BZ: No, no, well, yeah it was. It was an informal debate.

RV: Sure, sure.

BZ: I don't mean a formal—informal discussion; let's call it, not a debate. And I know John Kerry still. If we see each other we say hello but at that time I was very supportive of the Vietnam War and he was in his role as head of the AMVETS (American Veterans) and critical of the whole effort.

RV: Right, right. On campus, because you were Skull and Bones—well first I guess no one knew you were in it on campus while you were there?

BZ: Oh, no.

RV: Nothing like that?

BZ: No. That was the old Yale. This is not the Yale of today. As I say, it was a private prep school dominated student body. We had, I'm not sure of the exact figures, eight hundred and fifty members in our class. Now they run to fifteen hundred. There was a style alike. You had to wear jackets except on Saturday mornings during football season. You wore jackets to class, we had waitresses in the dining room, we had Sunday afternoon teas with the masters, we had biddies cleaning up our room and fixing up our fireplaces. It was quite a different world. Today it's mass education. Well, that's unfair. It's not mass education but you're very much on your own and the dining room is a buffet line, et cetera, et cetera.

RV: So less personal.

BZ: Hm?

RV: Less personal.

BZ: Well, less catered. But it's still a pretty nice life at these universities.

RV: Yeah. How often to you get back there or how often did you get back there?

BZ: Less and less. Since I'm from New Haven I have many New Haven friends who were classmates and our class by great coincidence was very active in the management of Yale for a number of years. Kingman Brewster was president, my best man at our wedding, Delaney Kiphuta was director of athletics, one of my club mates in Skull and Bones, Larry Pickett was dean of the medical school, another very close friend, Bob Arnstein, was in the university health office as psychiatrist, Hal Whiteman, another classmate was dean of students, so we were all over. And I used to get back there pretty often. In recent years obviously that's slowed down. I went to the sixtieth reunion. I didn't miss a reunion. I went to the sixty-fifth reunion.

RV: So what year did you graduate?

BZ: Nineteen forty-one.

RV: Okay. How would you describe the mood of the United States pre-1939? You're there at Yale a couple of years in just really looking at the rise of Nazi Germany and all of that. Was there a foreboding on the campus?

BZ: Very divided and in our time at Yale we had very intense controversy between the America First people, "Stay out of European wars." Which Kingman Brewster incidentally was a leader, later becoming a nationalist and those who said we must participate and support Britain, Russia, et cetera, and the leader there was his roommate, Bill Jackson. But that was a very, very intense thing. Remember we graduated in June of '41. That debate between the America Firsters and the Internationalists, of which President Franklin D. Roosevelt was one, was ongoing. Six months later came Pearl Harbor, or five months later or whatever it was, and that ended the argument except for fringe elements. Bertie McCormick, Colonel Lindbergh and a few others, but the attack on Pearl Harbor closed ranks in the country.

RV: Right. Was there any kind of expectation or any plans at all for you to go into the military before Pearl Harbor?

BZ: No, no, not at graduation, although a number—it was clear by then something was coming, whether it was the full-scale U.S. involvement or not. Maybe not, but remember the draft was continued by a margin of one vote and a number of our classmates went into the military after graduation. A number of them went into the Marine Corps where I ended up but it wasn't quite—not the mandatory thing but it wasn't quite the in thing to do yet. Obviously Pearl Harbor changed that and there were literally thousands, tens of thousands of volunteers.

RV: At Yale, besides Skull and Bones, looking back over that time, what was the most significant thing about your experience there, would you say?

BZ: I would—you know, at the present time—I would say my time in the *Yale Daily News*. I was very active, as I said, wrote a sports column, covered various football events. That was one. The other was being athletic secretary at Silliman College, the newest college. We won the intramural athletic cup. We had a wonderful master, a professor of philosophy named Filmar F.S.C. Northrop with a great wife who sort of treated us all like family. It was just a nice, nice year.

RV: Go ahead and tell me about your graduation.

BZ: We had a graduation. I was one of whatever it was, seven hundred graduates in cap and gowns. I must say my parents were there and very, very proud. You can imagine their feeling, immigrants in ’41, in less than twenty years out of all the chaos of Turkey and the genocide period, of seeing their son at one of the prestigious universities in America graduate on a scholarship. So that was a very emotional, emotional time. Incidentally, in that very modest home we had on Emerson Street, I had my whole Skull and Bones club out there and they were served a traditional Armenian shish kabob dinner and that was a great moment. So those were good years in many ways and then came the wars and all the rest. Okay.

RV: Okay, well let’s go ahead and end then for today.

BZ: All right.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 3 of 11
August 8, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history interview with Barry Zorthian. Today is August 8, 2006. It is 9:15 AM, Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock and Barry again is in Washington. Barry, we were chatting briefly before we began and we were talking about—you were reminiscing and talking about some of the stuff from your past that you wanted to make sure was down in this interview. If you would, could you go back and relate that information?

Barry Zorthian: Yeah. Let me just tick them off for later development when I get a transcript. Before my father's political exile by the Turks for three years that ultimately led to our coming to the United States and obviously had an impact on our family life and our approach to fear and so on, activities in high school in a wide range of things, and as I may have mentioned I was voted in the senior class, and my high school was a big high school then, I was voted senior class brightest, most versatile and what the hell else? It was something else.

RV: (Laughs) That's a lot already.

BZ: Yeah, including getting the outstanding student probus medal and that led also to the four-year scholarship to Yale. Going to the Boy's Club camp, New Haven Camp Clearview was my first camp. I went there when I was ten years old and again, between that and going to Camp Sequassen at thirteen or twelve, picking beans on my knees at ten cents a small bushel basket to earn money for those camps. The magazine and paper routes I had to earn money, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *New Haven Journal* courier, and what was a great tragedy was actually only the destruction of a bicycle, buying a new bicycle with money from those things and having it destroyed in an accident almost a week after I got the thing. Then when we get to the right time I don't want to forget our experience of the VOA (Voice of America) newsroom while I was chief with Joe McCarthy in the McCarthy hearings. We were very actively attacked at that time. I was interviewed by Cohen and Shine. But then I'll stop there. Oh, and one other thing was making Eagle Scout by the time I was fourteen, which was a very young age and the youngest in our scout district, the Quinnipiac Council. All this sounds

boasting but I just wanted to get it down so that I don't forget it when I review the transcript.

RV: Yes, sir. This is all very important stuff and it obviously is part of your development and a question that stems from this is you were very driven from a young age. How can you account for that?

BZ: Very what?

RV: Very driven and very proactive.

BZ: I don't know. I don't know whether that was a result of my father's political activities and instincts and so on. He had a drive within him, both intellectual and political and whether that translated to me—my two brothers were quite different. One was an artist and all the things artists do. The other essentially was in the middle and became a very good businessman but neither had the kind of type of drive my father had and I sort of inherited it, I guess. There was a great, great desire to do well in America, if you will, in those days, the American Dream.

RV: Did your father emphasize to you, or your mother emphasize to you that in order to make it in America you needed to do certain things or was this something you realized, "Wow, the door is wide open here. I can do really almost anything I want to do."

BZ: No, I think that came from my parents and particularly my father. He was always an activist and I think in his memoir he notes that trait in his youth and his drive and his school when he was young.

RV: What about politics? We talked about this just a bit in our last session but as far as political discussions within the household and at the family business there, how much to you remember of your family's political leanings?

BZ: Oh, particularly Sunday dinner where the family would eat together most of the time. My older brother, in his later years, would spin off to his individual activities but politics were always discussed but there's no doubt the great family hero was Franklin D. Roosevelt. I guess we were democratic right from the start. I remember tussles in the grammar school yard. One of my earliest memories is sort of a shoving contest with people on the other side in the Hoover/Al Smith campaign of 1928. My

family was one of the few, or I was reflecting my parents supporting Al Smith who was Catholic and not favored very much by the WASPs in the particular area we lived in.

RV: Is this a feeling and leaning that you kept the rest of your life going forward or did events change how you viewed politics and I guess the Democratic Party and Roosevelt's party through the twentieth century?

BZ: Well, I was basically a Democrat politically but not exclusively and not blindly. There are over the years Republicans I probably voted for but essentially was Democratic and presidential was certainly Democratic. When I was finally eligible to vote I was for Franklin Roosevelt, for Adlai Stevenson but by the time that we grow old you get more conservative. By the time of the Carter administration I was very disturbed by their policies in both foreign affairs and military affairs. Coming out of the Foreign Service at that time and with the Vietnam experience behind me I felt the Democrats or at least the Carter administration was mishandling both those areas, foreign affairs and military affairs. Then came the personal connections. Friendship is almost too strong a word but a personal connection with George H.W. Bush, the present President Bush's father, that led me to support him during his campaign for the nomination of 1980 and when Ronald Reagan chose him as vice-presidential candidate I followed into the Republican Party, registered as a Republican, largely because of support of George H.W. Bush but also a growing belief in the fact that the Democrats was represented by the whole Hubert Humphrey philosophy—solve all problems by throwing money at it, government money. That philosophy had run its course and a good deal of the deal of the Republicans were less government, less regulations, less taxes and so I thought that was right course to go. Now, the present administration, particular foreign policy actions distress me so I'm not sure where they are although I'm still technically registered Republican. I'm not sure where I am at the moment. A lot depends on who they come up with as a candidate for the next election.

RV: Okay. Well let's go back to Yale and you just graduated basically in June '41 if there's not anything else you want to talk about, and we can come back to it of course, talking about pre-Yale.

BZ: Well, Yale, as I said, we just talked about it and there's enough there. I emerged—how do you put it in its crudest terms—having been tapped for Skull and

Bones became, if you will, socially acceptable. I guess that's the phrase, accepted into the circles of the class leadership, which at that time was largely what they called the white shoe boys, the prep school element which was the majority of our class and by and large, particularly in terms of New Haven townies who lived at home and went to classes at Yale were looked down at. Being tapped into Skull and Bones and because of the activities that led to that sort of pulled me out of that category. So even after graduation I was much more involved in our class activities and even in Yale alumni activities.

RV: When you left Yale in '41, can you tell me where you were as far as what was happening in Europe and what you were thinking about with what Germany has done and the course?

BZ: Our class was heavily divided between the America Firsters, who were opposed to the U.S. involvement in the war, and the Internationalists who basically supported what Roosevelt was leading to. I tended to be more with the Roosevelt-supporting Internationalists rather than the America Firsters. At that time, as I said, and I think I mentioned this earlier, Kingman Brewster was chairman of the *Yale Daily News* and obviously in a position of importance on the campus and was a very avid America Firster and against involvement. His roommate and close friend, Bill Jackson, son of first attorney general and then Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, was on the opposite side, very much for the intervention. That never affected their friendship but they were actively opposed to each other on the war question. In the class and the campus as a whole was pretty much divided. As I say, my tendency also wasn't extreme, largely because of my foreign background with some of the aspects of fascism in the form of Turkish government rule and so I was to be an internationalist, to be an interventionist.

RV: Right. And where did that feeling come from, Barry? Where did your thought pattern come from?

BZ: Part of it was my father and family. Part of it, as I said, was because of my own origin and continued interest in democracy.

RV: Okay. So in the summer of 1941 can you tell me what you did? I know you're getting ready to join the Marine Corps coming up but what did you do in the interim?

BZ: Well, I wanted to get into journalism at that time and actually *Time Magazine* was my target. We had within Skull and Bones one of the senior editors, Ralph Davenport, senior editor of *Fortune*, and I asked him if he could do anything. At that time you joined something like *Time* as a copy boy and then gradually broke into the reporter or writing and that. He said, "Yeah, I can do something for you and probably get you a job as a copy boy," which was the entry level. But he said, "My advice to you is go out and work on a newspaper and learn your profession and learn your craft before you try to get into something like *Time*." I looked around. I probably could have gotten a job with the *New Haven Register* where I'd been a ten cents a column inch reporter and freelancer but I didn't want to stay in New Haven. I wanted to get out. One of my classmates at Yale, a fellow named Gordon Smith, not very close but a pretty good friend, his father owned a newspaper up in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. His father had been a Hearst reporter in the old front-page type of days in Boston and then gone through the classic newspaper route, buy a small-town paper and retire to that. His father bought the *St. Johnsbury Caledonian Record* in Vermont. Gordon said he was going up to join the family business. He was going to be a businessman; he was not a reporter, and he wanted to know if I wanted to come up and join the editorial staff and they finally called me the editor. This was, for a young college kid not yet twenty-one years old, a pretty attractive offer, not that the pay was much. I entered at fifteen dollars a week, I think was my starting salary, but July 1, 1941, I reported enough at St. Johnsbury, Vermont as "editor" of *St. Johnsbury Caledonia Record*. My classmate, Gordon Smith, the son of the owner and obviously ultimately owner himself was business manager. Well, editor was a name only job. It was a wonderful year. I did everything. I covered sports, I covered maple sugaring off parties, covered chicken pot pie Sunday dinners, covered the police, covered the whole lot of them. There were only three or four reporters I think on the whole staff who called themselves reporters. A lot of it was editing wire service copies and AP (Associated Press) copies that came in. But it was a lively little paper. We enjoyed it tremendously and I had a great year in St. Johnsbury.

RV: It seems like you had freedom to do really almost anything you wanted to do. Could you even design the layout of the paper?

BZ: I wrote editorials. Finally I was assigned so much I wanted a raise and the owner said, "I'll give you a raise, give you a ten cents a column inch like you had before. We'll measure it up at the end of each week." Well I started making so much like twenty or twenty-five dollars a week type of thing he said, "I can't afford it. We'll go back to giving you a set salary," and I think I ended up at twenty dollars a week.

RV: Did you have the freedom to design the layout of the paper?

BZ: Well, to some extent. Herb Smith, the old man, was still the editor and he obviously had a final review but no, my energies went more into the actual writing and I got very learned about the dairy industry. I knew pretty well the meaning of butterfat content in milk and the problems in pastures. St. Johnsbury had three industries. Each of them was the largest in the world. One was Fairbank scales, one was a maple sugar candy company and one made those old bowling pins, the candlestick bowling pins. That was our biggest thing. The rest of it was sort of a rural economy.

RV: What do you think you learned most during this time there? What was it that stuck with you throughout your career? Because I know you've talked about how significant this time was for you in your life when we haven't been doing this interview, this job and kind of getting you into the writing and getting you into the reporting and into really having a lot of autonomy within media relations. What was it, Barry, that you think you took most from this?

BZ: Well, I'm not sure I've thought that out enough. I suspect the answer would be the ability to get into a new subject cold but quickly and become knowledgeable enough about it to write about it, to write a reasonably concise and accurate story on it for the newspaper. That skill of going into a new subject, dealing with people, getting them to provide the information and then converting that information into, as I said, reasonably accurate, reasonably informed product and newspaper story is a skill you've got to develop. Some of it goes back to working on school newspapers, going way back and being a freelancer with the *New Haven Register* and during college with a couple of other newspapers, even the *New York Herald Tribune*, but the intense exposure to that kind of experience came in that year in St. Johnsbury as a result of covering such a wide range of subjects.

RV: Right. Okay, and tell me how long were you there exactly?

BZ: Well, I was there up until the time I left to go into the Marines. It was just about a year. I think it may have been almost exactly a year. I remember we were playing bridge with one of the other reporters and his wife on December seventh when word of Pearl Harbor came. And we put on extra that day, incidentally. Probably that Pearl Harbor period I suspect was almost in the last days that they put out extras. Now you have television and you can't possibly meet that maximum, but we did December 7, 1941. From then on it was a matter of—it seemed the whole country was going into the military services. It wasn't a real choice but they had a draft. I had a draft number. I've even forgotten what it was, E-24or something like that. I tried the Air Force, as I may have said, but was not acceptable. I had my bite, my teeth were not set properly and my eyesight made me wear glasses so the Air Force turned me down. There was a Marine recruiting station nearby. I remember seeing the movie *To the Shores of Tripoli* with that wonderful Irish actress, Maureen O'Hara, and saying to myself, "Boy, if that's the way the Marines are, that's for me." But anyway, I tried the Marines. They, too, had physical problems, including my eyesight, and I've often told this story. To pass that test legend maybe inaccurate was eating carrots would improve your eyesight. I must say I ate carrots until I fairly well turned orange. I've hated them ever since but I still didn't pass. So as editor of the *St. Johnsbury Caledonia Record* I wrote a letter to a new senator in Washington, a Vermont senator named Gail Aiken and asked him to ask the Marine Corps to give me a waiver on my eyesight so I could join the officer's candidate class. Well, he didn't get many requests for waivers for joining the Marines.

RV: I can imagine.

BZ: He was sensitive to constituents and the editor of a paper, so he did. He got the Marines to waive my eyesight, my deficient eyesight. The waiver stayed with me all the way through the Marine Corps. It's probably still on the record. But as a result of that I got sworn into the Marines. I've forgotten the exact date, June sixteenth, I think, 1942, left the paper, came home to New Haven, Connecticut to be with the family for a couple of weeks, and then down to Camp Quantico.

RV: Barry, tell me about Pearl Harbor and December 7, 1941 and kind of your feelings, where you were, what you were doing, and what you remember about that day.

BZ: Well, as I said, I was still in St. Johnsbury, still working on the paper. News was coming in fast. It was obviously an enormous shock to the whole nation although there was a buildup of tensions with the Japanese. Remember what was his name, Namora, who was in a Washington meeting with President Roosevelt when the attacks took place actually but this had been gathering. Churchill's great statement in the book *Gathering Storm*, "War had been gathering," largely in the European area. There were tensions with Japan going back to the invasion of Manchuria and there were other things but no one expected this kind of an attack. And the nation came together. There was still an element, a McCormick type resistance to the war continued but it was such a minor one. The nation went off to war. Everyone joined the military. It was almost, what shall I say, a black heyday. There was commentary on your character if you weren't joining the military. Four-f that was classification under the draft where you weren't physically fit and that was almost a badge of shame. Obviously some people couldn't possibly go into military service because of physical condition but the whole nation joined together. Patriotic shows, patriotic music. I remember one time between military schools, between Quantico and New Rivers, North Carolina, some of my Skull and Bones classmates, we all got together with everyone in uniform. We had Navy, Army and Marine Corps and had all of them with their girls; some of them married already and some not but the girls were very supportive. It was one of those classic gatherings you see World War II movies.

RV: Tell me about Quantico and actually before that, Barry, tell me what your parents thought about you joining the Marine Corps, and not just any branch but the Marines, which is very different, and then also going into this gigantic war. What were their thoughts and feelings on this?

BZ: Well, obviously they weren't happy. They'd seen war. They'd seen men going to war so the danger of it wasn't new to them but it was a very natural concern about their son and this was their youngest son. My two older brothers were not in uniform before me, they pulled up in uniform. All three of us were. They were both in the Army but they weren't going on and in the same place I guess there was a pride. He's going into the Marines with the toughest reputation and the toughest service. Remember the Marines were very involved in that early fight rather than waiting in various other

places. The Army of course was in the Philippines. So there was concern but the whole nation, as I said, everyone was into the war. Of our ethic group—I later did some research. Armenian-Americans, Americans of Armenian descent, of which maybe there were two hundred and fifty thousand in the entire United States at that time, if that many, fifteen thousand of them went into uniform in all the services. So it was expected in our neighborhood. The neighbor across the street, George Coe and various others, all in the service.

RV: Well, would you like to make some comments on Quantico and basic and getting in to the Marines?

BZ: Quantico, for me, I've never been very athletic or physical but obviously Quantico—we lived in tents put up in haste right near the railroad tracks. We arrived there as a group of—I almost said monsters but that's not fair. (Laughs) Strangers to each other and went through a very obviously established whole thing on short notice and making do. It was a ten-week training period as PFCs (Private First Class) to become officers. We'd wake up every morning in those tents with the sides rolled up because of the heat with a train going by us within about fifty feet or a hundred feet. And this went on with tough physical drills and field exercises, plus classroom exercises. But it was good. I probably was at that point at the end of that ten weeks was in the best physical shape I had ever been in and it was a fine group of people. A lot of them were just fresh graduates from college. A lot of athletes tended to go into the Marine Corps. Holder was the most manly of the group. And then we went into ten weeks of officer's class. In October we had our gold bars pinned on for second lieutenant and then ten weeks in officer's class. Tenth candidate's class, thirteenth ROC. They were pouring them out every two weeks. Then I got assigned and you never know in these wartime situations what leads to one thing. The base defense weapons, I think it was probably because I had a math course in college, "You must be able to handle those guns and all the calculations that go with them." So I got transferred from Quantico after the twenty weeks in Quantico plus a brief leave at home to New River, North Carolina. Camp Lejeune was just opening. Now it's an enormous base. It's the main base for the Marine Corps on the East Coast but then it was just opening. My middle brother who had been working in the war industry, he went into the military shortly thereafter, had just bought a new car, the

last of those available, a Studebaker, a small Studebaker, and he knew I was going doing to North Carolina so he offered to—God bless him, it was a major sacrifice—he offered to lend it to me for the time I was in Carolina, which was scheduled to be another ten weeks. It would have been thirty weeks of total training. One of the guys I picked up on the way was a man named George Schultz who later, as you well know, became secretary of state and various other things. But we drove down to Camp Lejeune together and were pretty good friends all through base defense weapons class in Camp Lejeune. We used to take weekends up to a place called Twin Pines Country Club, which was for Marine Corps officer's weekend guests. The training down there was in coastal weapons, in 150-millimeter coastal guns. As I said, why I got into that I'm not sure but nevertheless that was our training. Most of our officer's class people, a good many, about fifty, had gone from Quantico out to the First Marine Division that came off Guadalcanal and a lot of them were assigned as replacements to that division, and to the Second Marine Division as infantry leaders. My officers' class again wasn't quite as physical as the candidate class. It was more planning work. It was a lot of classroom work and so on. But again it was physical enough. I did all right at it. Of our class of about two hundred or so, a hundred and fifty, two hundred. I placed seventeenth in the class. That determines your standings, your numerical rank in the Marine Corps.

RV: Hey, Barry, let me interrupt for a moment. How would you describe the Marine Corps in the 1940s?

BZ: The Marine Corps in the 1940s, and I may have said this, was still largely a southern outfit. Very few ethnics in it. There was an element of maybe Boston Irish but an awful lot of the people were southerners and I have to say to you, being Barooyr Zorthian in the Marine Corps was not the easiest assignment in the world. Not that I faced any real discrimination but you know among the enlisted men there was some, "What the hell is this guy who is our commanding officer and one of our officers?"

RV: So they didn't treat you terribly different?

BZ: No, not too different, although you could feel some questions. Later when we were in the south in the bivouac a couple of tough guys who were not racist but awfully close to it—no, most of them were good. The battery commanders when I joined my outfit in the Pacific were Hunter Cohern, George Goode, Bill Moody, and the

commander of the unit was Prec Wood. It was that kind of element. I don't mean to overemphasize it but nevertheless it was that way. I didn't see my first black officer, African American officer, until '45. They were in there a little bit ahead of time. We had no blacks when I first joined in the ranks but I'm not sure when I saw my first black in the ranks but it was pretty late in the war. At that time a lot of the black soldiers were put in separate units if you'll remember. The Japanese were put in a separate unit. It was clear in the Marine Corps of race consciousness. Now, that changed during the war and of course after the war Harry Truman sort of by edict ordered the integration of the military service.

RV: Yes. Did you think that was a good idea?

BZ: Oh, yes, obviously. Although I didn't fight, only once in a battle, with the race of the Navaho Indians we had—what the heck was that movie's name? *The Whisperers* or something, where they were the communications people for the artillery battery. No, but the elimination of civil rights was certainly growing not only morally appropriate but as our society grew it was almost mandatory that the nation follow. But Camp Lejeune, then leave, then across the nation in again, one of the sharp memories, the old transcontinental Super Chief Santa Fe Railroad. It was the Silver Bullet. We traveled alone actually. We went out to San Diego for assignment overseas, joined what was it? It was a replacement battalion. I've forgotten the number. After a month at Camp Elliott at San Diego where our time was spent mostly drilling, it didn't make much sense. We were just waiting. We were all put aboard the ship called *Lorelei*, which was one of the luxury passenger liners between California and Hawaii before the war. It was a great ship converted to a troop ship but it still had a lot of the attractive features filled with Marines. On the way it stopped off at Samoa. We eventually disembarked in Noumea, New Caledonia, which was a French protectorate where the Marines Raider battalions were and where there was an assignment depot for replacement battalion people. Again, close friend, Larry Bangser and I tried to join. You know, those were the days when you were gung-ho. You wanted to get into the toughest part of the military. We tried to join the Raiders. We had a meeting with one of the commanding officers of Eddy's Raiders and Carlson's Raiders. It was Carlson's Raiders who were there. Larry was accepted and transferred by request from the replacement battalion. I was not. Why, physically I

wasn't—Larry was real tough looking and the football type. I probably didn't look the part. But at any rate, after about a month in Noumea waiting for assignments I was plucked out again for ten weeks of base defense weapons training, put aside and then I was assigned to field artillery, Eleventh Marines with the First Marines Division, which had come off Guadalcanal and was then stationed in the Melbourne area of Australia for rest and recuperation. A lot of the wounded and longer-serving types were transferred home, some remained with the unit, but I was transferred from Noumea to the Eleventh Marines. I got there with an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) through Sydney. No big opera house then and then down by train to Melbourne, Australia where I spent five very pleasant months. The Australian Ninth Division, the men of Australia were in Europe, the Ninth Division was in Tripoli. The Marines were the only young men or largely young men around. Australian women were very hospitable. The country was very grateful to the Marines for having "saved us" because of Guadalcanal. I spent five months learning field artillery.

RV: Tell me about that. What did you learn? What did they teach you?

BZ: Well, you had artillery exercises, particular battery. I was Second Battalion, Eleventh Marines, First Marine Division, initially in Fox Battery. I didn't know a damn thing about artillery, learned to become a forward observer in the field exercises, learned something about the guns, learned something about aiming. Incidentally, people like George Schultz and other members of that base defense weapons class were assigned to base defense. George spent most of his Marine Corps days on an island in the Pacific with base defense weapons. Very few had the same fortune I had of getting into front-line division, but so be it. I became a forward observer, one of two in each battery. Our particular battalion, Second Battalion, was in field support of the Fifth Marines who were one of the three infantry regiments in the division. I had five months there. Field exercises, training, but a lot was in the military. Relaxed social beer parties, et cetera, et cetera. The unit kept getting new replacements for some of the veterans but enough of the veterans who had gone through Guadalcanal remained. After five months we took off for the war up the coast of Australia in a Liberty ship of all things, which was the most miserable, newest ship. Men in the hold, bunks side by side, a few officers up in the aft structure but the ship was hardly pleasant and sure as hell not the *Lorelei*. But we

stopped off in Finchhaven, for which the unit, we got a battle star although very little conflict. We went ashore just to back up the Army units who were fighting in New Guinea and then went into our first real combat in Cape Gloucester in New Guinea where we were, oh about a month or two months or so. I was a forward observer at that time.

RV: Can you kind of describe what your daily duties were in that position?

BZ: Well, forward observers' casualty rate was higher than the infantry rate, the front line rate. You were stationed with the forward units. You had a communication man with you and your job was to be out in the front and call for artillery fire as required and adjust that artillery fire until it hopefully hit the target. You used a pair of field glasses, a field telephone sometimes or a field radio, but being out front as I say was the key to being an effective forward observer. We went in, the forward observer, not the guns themselves, with the front units. I was in the second or third wave or whatever it was at Cape Gloucester. The guns came in after the infantry battalions had landed and they came in with this Seventy-five Pack Howitzer. It was a descendent, if you will, of the French Seventy-five of World War I. It was called a Pack Howitzer. It would break down into seven loads. The artillery crew, the Marines, would have to hand carry those Howitzers and some of them were a couple of hundred pounds they had a barrel and so on. But they'd come in on LSTs, the ramp would go down and the Marines would hand carry the seven pieces of the gun with other Marines carrying the ammunition and so on. They'd put the gun together ashore. Sometimes we'd have a Jeep to haul it, otherwise it would have to be hauled by hand, and get into firing position, producing on the command, on the instruction through the battery firing the commands of the forward observer where fire was needed. We did a lot of shooting on Cape Gloucester, took the airfield, which had been the objective, which the Japanese had been using and then I had a fascinating part of my experience. Part of the Japanese retreated into the almost primeval forest of New Guinea and the Australians had mobilized the New Guinea aborigines and as a forward observer with artillery available I was assigned to a couple of those patrols. I went out with them, picked up a little bit of pigeon English, which the Australians use to communicate with the Aborigines. So we'd go into one or two day marches into the jungle as it would lend itself to us and call for artillery. Later in that phase my then battery commander had the only pilot's license in our battalion. Battalions

were assigned L-5 airplanes which were small enough to land on the road, very primitive roads in a place like that. Jim Harris, as a licensed pilot, was assigned to pilot that plane. He took me as one of his forward observers sitting in the back seat of that plane with boxes and rations and so on, on my lap and we'd go on flights to these forward teams and patrols and get them very primitive bombing runs in, dropping boxes of C-rations out of the plane to land near the patrol to re-supply them with food, water, et cetera. That was quite an assignment.

RV: Sounds like it. What was it like being in combat?

BZ: Well, what do you say? It was combat. (Laughs)

RV: (Laughs) I don't know. That's why I'm asking. What was your impression? You're a young, impressionable, very intelligent and observant young man.

BZ: You're concerned for these people. Cover up when needed. You have to remember the infantry bears the brunt of it. But the Japanese would fire back. They had their own mortars. They had artillery. On Okinawa they lost quite a lot of men like the forward gunmen. We went from Gloucester down to a very attractive almost South Sea Island setting area called Talesea, one of the Pacific—town is too strong a word—settlements. Very blue bay, palm trees. We landed there because there had been Japanese there or units of the Japanese were marching. It was a company or something like that. We lost our battalion doctor over there with the wounded and lost a couple of other men but our battery was assigned down there. I was still a forward observer. We were stationed there for, oh, I don't know a couple of weeks did some patrolling again, got my Japanese flag. One of the great combat souvenirs of the war were the Japanese flags that the Japanese soldiers used to have when they left home. All their family and friends and so on would sign the flags for good luck and they'd have those in their belongings. I kept mine from that Talesea thing for something like forty years. Then I read about someone just last year in New York, some Army soldier, deciding to return it to Japan to see if they could find the owner. I took mine down to the Japanese embassy here and asked them to send it back to Tokyo, which they did, to see if they could find the family of the owner because in Japanese characters the names were all over. Talesea had some combat. As I said, we lost a few people there but it was not a long assignment. Again, I'd have to go into the records to look up the time but it was a couple of weeks

and then back to—between Australia and Finchhaven we had stationed ourselves briefly on the Russell Islands. After Cape Gloucester we went back to one of the Russells called—no, we stationed ourselves at the D'Entrecasteaux. After Cape Gloucester we went back to the Russell Islands to one of them called Pavuvu and there established our base camp and went into training. By this time most of the veterans of Guadalcanal were gone or were transferred out and we were on Pavuvu for several weeks, not several months. I was gaining inevitably in seniority as more senior members of the unit were transferred back to the States, having spent quite a bit of time overseas. I became executive officer and the number two rank in our battery in charge of the actual guns and the firing of those guns and had to learn that business. I'd obviously been exposed to it to a certain extent then but my new job was executive officer. We'd gotten some more officers as forward observers, reconnaissance officers and so on. So the last several months we were there we were on one of the Lever Brother's coconut plantations. The rumor was and probably was true that every tree we cut down the Leaver Brothers would get five bucks. We'd have a certain amount of social life, all obviously men but a certain amount of beer became available, there was a makeshift officers' club, training exercises for several weeks or a couple of months, maybe three or four months on that island and then we took off for out next battle assignment which was Peleliu. Peleliu is one of the forgotten battles, almost forgotten. It was probably as bad as Iwo Jima maybe, not quite. The division landed, we were under McArthur's command, post-war military observers, analysts, historians have said, not unanimously but a lot of them, that Peleliu was an unnecessary battle and was opening the gateway to the Philippines for McArthur's return. Was it really necessary is another question. You'd have to look up the exact figures but we had seven or eight thousand casualties on Peleliu.

RV: Yes.

BZ: I brought our guns in, our battery. We never got more than a hundred yards offshore with our guns. It was the first time we had direct fire. We'd fire a Seventy-five Pack Howitzer at line of sight firing. We were in support then of the First Marine Division, Chesty Puller's division, which fought up those mountains with tremendous clout and Peleliu, was a very, very rough, relatively short battle for us. We got pulled out of there fairly quickly, two weeks or three weeks or whatever, simply because we had

such heavy casualties, replaced an Army unit, and Peleliu—we went back to Pavuvu to our base camp again, back into training, back into receiving and replacement troops, etc. This is by now, what, '44? Late '44. We moved into '45, next assignment Okinawa in support of our First Division again. All three Marine divisions were involved in Okinawa, First, Second, and Sixth. I was still executive officer. We had gone from 75 millimeter Pack Howitzers to 105 millimeter Howitzers. The landing at Okinawa—we got there again in an LST. Endless, endless, slow trip across the Pacific. I said in writing our great break was being put on a beach on an island called Ulithi, one of those rocky specs out in the Pacific and being given two warm cans of beer, which we thought was the ultimate luxury, sitting on the beach drinking warm beer with the Pacific in front of us. But we finally landed on Okinawa. Landing was easy. The one division turned north. We turned south, driving the Japanese. The naval gun fire and air strikes had pulverized that town of Naha. The Japanese were badly hit but they set up very strong defenses and our division got involved in the battle for Shuri castle with our artillery guns, our batteries as well as the others backing them up. It took about a month to reach the end of the island, Okinawa, and which I keep saying the lead Marines, the infantry units saw the end of the island, ran up, threw a stone in, and said, "The battle is over." The bunker was just remnants but the Japanese just kept fighting for another two or three weeks. But Okinawa was a tough one. It didn't have the intensity of Peleliu. At times it did but in terms of overall cost to the division I guess it was almost as bad. By then, by the end of that I'd had twenty-eight months overseas and one night after the fighting had stopped we were in the encampment. We were called out. The adjutant had received the message and he said, "The following officers will leave at whatever time, in about three or four hours, for the United States." We were assigned. My name was on that list. We were assigned to what they ended up calling it I don't know but it was a training assignment to train the American divisions coming over from Europe, the European war had ended, for the assault of the Japanese mainland island. Eventually got to the States. Guam, Honolulu, then aboard those flying boats Pan American used to run, landing in San Francisco Harbor. Two or three days in San Francisco, train across the country, two or three days in Chicago and then home for home leave. While I was on home leave both of my brothers had been in the service, the older one married, living in an area in

Maryland. The whole family gathered down there to visit. While we were driving down came word of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and then what was it, a week later on Nagasaki. War ended of course so I never got into that training assignment. Instead I was assigned, along with some others, down at Quantico again where there was a field artillery training battalion still training people to go out as replacements in the Pacific. With combat ending they didn't see combat but they did replace people who had been in combat. And I spent up until June in Quantico, about six months or a little more than that I guess, from August to about June, ten months. I applied for a regular commission, although wartime commissions were reserve, regular commission in the Marine Corps so that I applied simultaneously to get legal training. The Marines were offering regular officers a chance to go to law school to become legal officers in the Marine Corps. I applied for that.

RV: What led you there, Barry? Why did you want to go that route?

BZ: Oh, I don't know. For a long time I'd always had two possible career choices. One was journalism and one was law and this seemed attractive. At that point I didn't know what to do. I still wanted journalism but I also thought a career in the Marines as a lawyer might not be bad for twenty years or whatever. But at any rate I was not accepted for the law school. I was accepted for the regular Marine Corps, the regular commission but I said, "Twenty years of this or whatever, sixteen more years of this getting up at five-thirty in the morning type of thing is not for me, not when I want to be a lawyer." So I put in for a release, was released, came back to New Haven, Connecticut.

RV: You got back to New Haven. Tell me what happened. First of all, I want to know, how did it feel to be out of this huge war and back into your hometown? Was it a difficult transition for you?

BZ: Well, it wasn't a difficult transition but like a lot of veterans you get out of uniform, you get back into civilian life, you're a little bit lost with what to do and New Haven was the center of my universe, college and all the rest, so my parents were both alive, my brothers were gone one way or another in wartime. One brother had married and lived in Maryland and then was moving out to the West Coast. The other brother had married or met the girl. I guess he got married during the war and was living in New Orleans so I was the only one with my family. My family was sort of breaking up the

household. I don't mean they were breaking up between them but breaking up the household. Father sold the house in due course. I went down to the *New Haven Register*, in a sense what I left, and took a job there as a reporter. This was in June or July of '46 and settled into that kind of a job. Familiar with the people, had some friends in town, a number of classmates and Yale college acquaintances had come back to town to New Haven for post-graduate studies and so on. Father sold the house and I moved into one of these rooming houses right near the university and entered a pretty pleasant phase of life being a city desk reporter for the *Register*, having some friends around, social activity and so on, but there's no doubt I was getting restless and wanted to move on and particularly go to New York for journalism. At one point in the fall of '46 I went to a reception for one of the Yale societies. Actually it was the Skull and Bones society and ran into my old college managing editor; he was a two years ahead of me, of the *Yale Daily News* named Lowell Clucas. I said, "What are you doing?" All he said was, "I'm with the Voice of America." I said, "What the hell is that? I've never heard of it." Well, he explained what it was to me. He was sort of an editor in a pretty good position at the Voice of America. I said, "I'm trying to get to New York in some role or another." He said, "Why don't you apply and I'll make sure you get a job?" I forgot the exact job but I think I was making what was considered living wage then, fifty dollars a week at the *Register*, and Lowell said, "Well, our starting salary in New York is eighty dollars a week." It was a big increase. I also had a friend at the *Register* who was an out-of-towner getting into New Haven who wanted to go to New York as well, Phil Schier. So I applied for a job in New York, I was accepted, Phil quit his job, he had something going. We went to New York, roomed together on East Seventy-First Street in Yorktown. In those days Manhattan was much more sort of ethnically divided. East side in the seventies was Germantown and we had what was called a railroad apartment. The john in the hallway, one room after another, the bathtub with a cover on it was the kitchen counter and we lived there. Remember the rent was fifteen dollars a month. It was rent controlled but I joined the Voice of America as the GS7, government terminology and rank, at eighty dollars a month as a news writer in New York. We were on Fifty-Seventh Street, the office was. The Voice was then in three buildings, the General Motors building at Fifty-Seventh and Broadway, the Fisk Building at Fifty-Seventh and

Broadway across the street, and the building we were in, the Argonaut Building right off Fifty-Seventh and Broadway. And there I went into working at the Voice. My first program was something called "Commentator's Digest" where we would record all the commentators of the day, H.V. Kaltenborn, Elmer Davis, Fulton Lewis, the whole range of things. These were on old acetate disks and I would sit and listen and mark one or two minute excerpts of their comments and then write in continuity between them. "And on this issue Fulton Lewis had this today," and run it. It was a pretty good show, actually. They ought to do it today.

RV: (Laughs) How was it for you? Was that exciting?

BZ: It wasn't exciting but it got me to New York. I made contact again with some various friends. I lived with a roommate but as a single and here I was. I went into that for quite awhile and then the Voice developed but that's a whole new story.

RV: Right. Tell me about New York City. How would you describe it then? Is this in 1948?

BZ: This is early '47. If I remember the date it was January of '47 when I went to New York.

RV: Okay. Tell me about New York City in 1947. What do you remember about the city itself?

BZ: Well, I'm not sure I have any particular insight. New York City was the center of the journalism universe at least. It had all the traditional complex of ethnic elements, political elements, and so on. It was coming out of the war and in that sense as new developments took place it was exciting. Ultimately what was a factor in my married life, they were building for returning veterans. Levittown was developing out on Long Island; Metropolitan Insurance Company was building Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village. Things were developing very much to adjust to a post-war world. The UN (United Nations) was just starting. One of the things I covered in the Voice of America that we'll get in later was the United Nations. They were out in Flushing Meadow but then the Rockefellers gave them the land on the East Side to build that UN headquarters so New York was in the forefront, if you will, of a post-World War II world. Who the heck was mayor then? This was even before Abe Beame. Pretty soon, it wasn't quite then, I guess it was later, John Lindsey, brother of a classmate of mine,

George Lindsey, became mayor of New York. The Fiorello LaGuardia period was all over. You know, I've frankly forgotten who was mayor then but it was a revived city and it was starting to adjust to the post-World War II world.

RV: Before we get into the Voice of America deal, could you make some comments on the Cold War? This is the dawn of this, '44, '45, '46, '47. What was the mood there regarding the Soviet Union?

BZ: We had been allies with the Soviet Union during World War II and strange things, strains to that alliance were happening, divisions. Harry Truman sort of was drawing the lines. In Iran, the Greek-Turkish—the reigning block we had put up for Soviet expansion. The Russians were trying to move into Iran in order to get a warm water port. Czechoslovakia, John Masaryk committing suicide. The Russians were becoming a menace after this World War II alliance. It was a very great concern. Europe was supine. We came up with the Marshal Plan; the U.S. came up with the Marshal Plan to revive Europe. Whether Europe was strong enough to withstand Soviet pressures was a very real question. The whole future of the Western Europe and even the Middle East seemed to be at stake. Whether it would come under the communist Russian domination or not was a big question mark. Remember in New York during the thirties, the height of the Depression, the Soviet formula, communist government ownership and responsibility had had a certain appeal. There was certainly a question in that period as to whether the capitalist system had the answers for the future. Now, there was a lot of tension between those who said, "No it doesn't, or at least not all the answers," and the hunt for communism. It led to the Hollywood Ten, it led to McCarthyism, it led to that whole rough period of snuffing out any attraction the communist system must have held. I was a New Haven boy who had gone through the Marines. I was sort of just naïve about all this, certainly not involved in it but this was my education.

RV: Yeah. What did you personally feel about the Soviet Union and the chances the United States had against this monolith?

BZ: I didn't know very much about it. I was all for Harry Truman, certainly not for Tom Dewey.

RV: Tell me about that. Tell me about Harry Truman and what you thought about him.

BZ: Well, not that I was very active but Tom Dewey was a sort of picturesque figure, clear blue suits with a great quota that looks like a bridegroom on a wedding cake. Harry Truman was a tough knot and that let to great admiration, for one thing because he had been in the military. He had been Captain Harry and so a lot of us, particularly if we were Democrat inclined as I was then, he was quite a figure. But no, no, the Dewey approach, ultimately northeastern Republicanism, Rockefeller Republicanism sort of got more attractive but not at that point.

RV: Did you think that Harry Truman was taking the United States in the right direction at the time?

BZ: I'm sorry, I barely heard you.

RV: I'm sorry, Barry. Did you think that President Truman was taking the country in the right direction at the time?

BZ: Oh yeah, that he was facing tough, tough problems. And remember he was surrounded by people who you had to admire: George Marshal, Dean Acheson at one point, and George Marshall and that whole period of the northeastern establishment; Bob Lovett, John—what was his name who had been ambassador to Germany? But no, there was much more of a national unity then. Remember Arthur Vandenberg coming out for bipartisanship and Tom Connelly. The country was pulling together. There were extremist fringes that led to the Joe McCarthy's of the world or in the reverse I guess to a Henry Wallace type of approach but remember Truman won re-election despite a split from the South of Strom Thurmond, a split from the Liberals of Henry Wallace, and the Republican challenge of Dewey. He still won and that's where the heart of the nation was.

RV: Were you feeling effects of this when you started Voice of America?

BZ: Not that actively. Sure, a little bit of it. I guess the Voice of America staff was largely, as we were charged later, "Democrat" but it wasn't part of the politics as much as a philosophy of governments, of foreign policy projection and so on.

RV: Well, Barry would you like to go ahead and wrap up for today and we'll start with Voice of America?

BZ: Yeah, let's wrap up.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 4 of 11
August 21, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is August 21, 2006. It is a little after 9 AM Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock and Barry is again in Washington. Barry, let's pick up with moving on to this very important job you had with Voice of America. Could you kind of give us an overview of what Voice of America was at the time, what its mission was, its purpose, and then describe what you did?

Barry Zorthian: Well, the voice of America began broadcasting in 1942 into Europe as part of our wartime efforts during World War II. It was essentially considered a propaganda instrument but its content it claimed would be a projection of accurate information, which presumably people on the continent under German rule were not to seek. It then converted, if you will, into a Cold War instrument in the mid-fifties in the whole international broadcasting picture it got Radio Free Europe; Radio Liberty added. The Voice continued in English and kept adding languages and again it was considered by strong advocates as a very essential instrument in the Cold War to project information, accurate news, particularly accurate news about communism. A lot of it therefore was critical about Soviet control and Soviet communism into the denied areas. Now there was a great deal of controversy, if you will, or difference on just how the Voice was to carry out its mission. There were the advocates of a very strong anticommunist content, not balanced, not objectivity necessarily in the news, the major yardstick being, was it effective against communist interests? Others had said you achieve that same goal of undercutting communism by broadcasting "the truth" balanced, objective, and honestly. You build up your credibility and what's in the communist regime until their own people will be discredited. This controversy went on for quite a while. It reached its peak, if you will, during the Joe McCarthy period when the Voice was one of the targets of Senator McCarthy. I liked to think, and I think there is evidence to this, that I was one of the leaders, particularly in the five years I had as program manager of the Voice. Changing the Voice from what was essentially a post-World War II and Cold War propaganda instrument into a credible, respected conveyor and projector of accurate

information on world developments from an American viewpoint and then that role that the voice was fulfilling its mission and being helpful had become an asset to the United States and was really projecting U.S. interests, that U.S. interests called for credible balance. This issue was finally, what shall I say, codified in a VOA charter, which I had a hand in writing. Actually the actual writer was a then deputy director of Voice of America, Jack O'Brien. The charter called for projection of objective and balanced news and world developments, a responsible projection and responsible discussion of U.S. foreign policy, a reflection of American life, again accurately and objectively. That charter was first endorsed by the director of the Voice of America at that time and then by the director of the U.S. Information Agency, then actually incorporated into law as active in the Voice of America in the early sixties and signed by President Gerald Ford.

RV: When you first got in, Barry, what was your specific job?

BZ: Well, I think I've already reported how I got in touch with Voice and joined it. I was what the government sees as a GS7 level. My job was I was part of a commentary unit for worldwide English broadcast and my job was two-fold. The one I was responsible for a program called "Commentators Digest." Those were the days when on radio, U.S. domestic radio, there were many, many commentators on all kinds of world events, Elmer Davis, Fulton Lewis, H.V. Kaltenborn, and on and on. My job was to get—we recorded their daily commentaries. My job was to go over them and take sound bites, one or two minute excerpts from those. We had all old vinyl platters. We took those, write bridges between them, and put on a half-hour or fifteen minute depending on the day and the show "Commentators Digest" broadcast. Here's what U.S. commentators are saying. Now, secondly and less frequently but nevertheless I also did the same thing with editorials from newspapers. And finally even less frequently did commentaries of my own projecting and putting forth American policy as a commentary. This went on for a while. I joined in early 1947. That year there was a great deal of controversy debate about continuing the Voice, not continuing it, the government shouldn't be broadcasting, that should be a private enterprise, and so on. The decision was finally made to privatize a lot of the Voice and to farm the task out at that time to NBC radio and CBS radio. In addition that was the period when the so called Smith-Mundt Act was passed, which prohibited the U.S. government from projecting,

transmitting, broadcasting its content of the Voice of America to the American people, prohibiting the U.S. government from propagandizing the American people. The Voice's staff was reduced considerably. I was among those let go but we were picked up and in effect we were transferred. I was in a group transferred to CBS when it was on Fifty-Second Street I guess on Madison Avenue and we did a very small group, did news broadcasts for what passed as the Voice of America at that time.

RV: How did you feel, Barry, about privatizing Voice of America?

BZ: I guess I had skepticism as to whether the networks, which were focused largely on commercial results, would do a balanced job. On the other hand, the reasoning was that because they were private they would be much more objective and accurate than government broadcasts under government pressure. In practice the networks did perfectly fine. CBS did, as did NBC I guess, had a short wave broadcast news department. We broadcast in those days also in South America incidentally, as well as Europe. Not much Asia from CBS but those were also the early days of television, which was growing right across the street from the building we were in. I think CBS was in about two or three buildings. Those were the days of Doug Edwards with his fifteen-minute nightly news show. Who was the sponsor? It was Longin Watches or Timex or one of them was the sponsor. At any rate, that lasted about a year. The contracts were a year. The commentaries, the so called presentations of U.S. foreign policy, remained in the Voice of America hands. A very small staff continued at the Voice of America offices and prepared these commentaries, which were carried by the networks in the midst of their other programs, the networks that did Voice of America transmissions. NBC and CBS both got tired of the government oversight, pressure on them, the agency must feature an overseas broadcasting. They incidentally still own—NBC has some short wave transmitters up in Schenectady. CBS has some. They still owned hardware but they finally said, "To hell with it. We want out." So it went back, the Voice went back to being a government agency in the fall of '48 and from that point on remained a government agency, again back to its mission of transmitting and broadcasting accurate and balanced news. What constituted balance in the midst of the Cold War was the subject of the controversy I mentioned earlier.

RV: Hey, Barry, let me ask you a question. How much freedom did you have when you were doing the editing for "Commentaries Digest" and doing some of your own commentary and then going to CBS and coming back to VOA? How much autonomy did you have individually to do what you wanted to do?

BZ: Well, pretty much obviously I was in a framework of knowing what I was supposed to be doing which was projecting, as I say, positive news about developments in the free world and negative news about developments in the communist world.

RV: And so whatever went in line with that was fair game?

BZ: There was all through that, incidentally, a State Department, usually a foreign service officer representative who sat near the news desk and provided policy guidance which meant they had the right to order news items off the air or on the air. We had many a long discussion with that policy advisor, some of whom were very good. Some of them in my mind were very bad but that was a continuing issue and that continued, that policy advisor continued into the fifties when, in effect at that time I was chief of the Voice of America newsroom, I shifted to being policy advisor. We, the Voice, took over the role from the State Department. Under, we were then part of USIA (United States Information Agency). Well, '48 the Voice came back into existence. It sits in three buildings in the middle of Manhattan, the Argonaut Building, the Fisk Building, and the old General Motors Building at Fifty-Seventh Street and Broadway, that corner. I was being promoted fairly rapidly. When we came back from the network I was the first member of the English language news division. All alone I used to bat out. We did not get the Associated Press and UPI (United Press International) in those days. We were dependent upon writers and the newspapers. There was a set of newspapers in New York at that point but I would tap out a story. Each story would be on one page and we'd put them on a long table, placing them as news developments took place, shifting their order as we decided some stories got more important and some less important. The announcers would come in and his only job was to read, particularly a fine old man named Paul Parks, pick up the papers sheet by sheet, go into the studio, "And now the news," and then they'd read those things. The bridge would be a sort of pause. "Paris," read the item, pause. "Washington, DC." That's the way our news started. Eventually we got an English language news staff, as distinct from a central news staff, of about six people. As

the programs grew more and more broadcasts were added. Finally the decision was made that English news having a separate division staff didn't make sense. It would be merged into the central news desk. The central news desk was under the, if you will, management and direction of a group of old-timers who had joined up first during World War II and was still there. The management, the newer management of the Voice overall had some doubts about their commitments and so on and I was appointed chief of the overall English language news. I think the year was 1952. I was thirty-two years old.

RV: Barry, why were you getting promoted so quickly?

BZ: Well, you like to think competence.

RV: (Laughs) Yeah, right.

BZ: There were many others and I had some news background and I guess the judgment was the English language news operation, which I had started and remained chief of was done quite well and I think it was. So the powers that be, the management of the Voice, the program manager, decided to bring what he thought was that kind of competence and professionalism to the central news desk.

RV: Okay.

BZ: I was thirty-two, running a staff of, oh I don't know, we had fifty or so, I guess. It was a twenty-four hour operation with a daytime shift, evening shift and overtime shifts, broadcasting worldwide. That news produced by that central news division did both the news broadcast in English and provided the news files for the languages and languages were being added. I think we ended up with forty-four languages being broadcast. This was through the mid-fifties President Eisenhower in office who laid great emphasis on information projection overseas, created the U.S. Information Agency, took it out of state, gave it independence with a director and it got self-control. In that process many questions were raised about this strange organization with a lot of foreigners and immigrants who were new U.S. citizens sitting in New York and operating without sufficient oversight and control. So Congress—and part of what lent weight to those thoughts was our experience under Joe McCarthy. But in '54, the Voice of American, except for a very small New York office, was moved to Washington. Studios were built in what was then the Health, Welfare, and Education Building. That's the building it's still in some fifty years later, obviously with better and newer facilities.

The Joe McCarthy period reflected this issue of should the Voice be blatantly anticommunist or more objective and balanced. There was within the Voice an element of what shall I call them, militant anticommunists who organized and very much under wraps started monitoring various operations which they subsequently charged with being soft on communism and having "agents" in the various language staffs to pinpoint those that weren't anticommunist enough. We'd have morning policy meetings of the staff where that policy advisor I mentioned earlier from the state and the program manager of the voice would preside and instructions would be given out on what news stories to handle and how to approach it and handle it and so on. But in any rate, under Joe McCarthy this group, this internal vigilante group surfaced and people emerged in various desks—French desks, Romanian desks, Russian desks, and in the news division and the news division in which I was chief we had one fairly senior editor who had developed a very real, what shall I say, bitterness almost towards some of his fellow editors and they would argue about words and his name was Virgil Fulling. McCarthy, as you may know, was on black and white television, the end of which was the famous Joseph Welsh broadcast. But our editor was both interviewed by McCarthy people, Roy Cohn and Schine and brought down to Washington, put on television, where he accused three of his fellow editors who sat around a horseshoe desk with him to being sympathetic to communism and of editing news stories to where they were friendly or at least not critical enough about communism. It got into a great issue about the use of words, pro-democratic forces as against anticommunists forces, describing in Guatemala the rebels who were trying to take over the government the United States was endorsing, whether they should be described as pro-democratic or anticommunist, and that kind of an issue. The broadcast fell on the day that Joseph Stalin's death was announced and you can imagine that this was the most important story of the year for the VOA news desk so our whole staff was pouring out copies while at the same time on our in office TV sets, black and white small sets, Virgil Fulling, our fellow staff member and fellow editor was on national television under Joe McCarthy's chairmanship accusing three of the editors who were working in the newsroom at that time of being friendly and pro-communist.

RV: How did that strike you?

BZ: Well, it was a tremendous, tremendous emotional, almost physical event. The newsroom did not get much protection from our seniors. A new director of the Voice of America, Republican appointed, sat in his office, closed the door, and wouldn't see anyone. Our program manager who later became an ambassador did nothing. We were on our own and we went to work to try to save ourselves. We called up every newsperson we had contacts with, got some very good backing. Elmer Davis, for instance, who had been in wartime information, was extremely helpful. One of the people accused of being procommunist, Don Taylor, was a good friend of Joe Alsop—not Joe, his brother, Joe Alsop's brother, and he wrote a favorable column. I called every contact I had, including travel to Washington to talk to various media people, the few that I knew down there. We came out of it reasonably well but there was no doubt that this had been a very major trial period for the Voice of America and that whole experience with the McCarthy charges was part of what led to the transfer of the entire operation to Washington where "the government could keep a better eye on the Voice."

RV: Right. Were you ever interviewed?

BZ: I was interviewed. At one point a fellow named Fred Galvin who had ties to the Rosenwald family, the Sterns of New Orleans who had close ties to Senator Scoop Jackson—who was on the McCarthy committee—he had Cohn and Schine interview me in that famous suite in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. I must confess I've gone through wars and I'm Armenian and so on and don't frighten easily but I, after that interview, was one of the most frightening moments of my life.

RV: Why do you say that?

BZ: The evil and the lack of morality that those two young people—the absolute ruthlessness that they showed. There was no one to listen to reason. Things like, "Are you a hundred percent perfect?" The only honest answer is you're never a hundred percent perfect but we did our best the majority of the time. "Well we don't want you to testify about that. We want you to testify about the places where you made errors." They really forced the resignation of one of the three editors who had had been accused by letting him know they knew he had a common-law wife and that his son who was fairly grown up by then was born out of wedlock, Harold Berman.

RV: Harold Murk?

BZ: Harold Berman.

RV: Berman, okay.

BZ: He resigned. They did not call me up. It would have been hard accusing me of pro-communism or of favoring communists either on staff or more broadly. My track record of an immigrant who had fled state terrorism; I had gone through the Marine Corps and been in combat so I had not worked at the Voice during the war. I didn't have any part in the programs towards Russia in that period. Some of this went back to these were people friendly to Russia during World War II. So it would have been hard to pin anything on me. There was nothing on the record. But they did not call me to Washington to testify and did not have anyone seriously testifying in favor and support of the Voice of America newsroom. Other parts of the Voice were also attacked. We had two suicides then and incidentally Virgil Fulling in due time committed suicide. I think even though we had to live with him he was pretty much ostracized by the staff and finally—and one of the things that I'm proud of is that all three of the people who were accused remained. The one who resigned I got back on staff in due time. He had a very distinguished career in VOA. The other two, one became chief of the VOA newsroom at one point and the third one, Don Taylor, joined the USIA Foreign Service and had a very good career. So all three of those were saved and protected, if you will.

RV: So it seems that they "passed" you and you were acceptable and you could move on with your career.

BZ: Yeah.

RV: But they could have easily derailed it right there.

BZ: They never brought charges against me personally. It was against the newsroom generally and particularly three editors there. Now, down in Washington when it was settled in, all of us moving from New York, or many of us, not everyone, settled in and went back to little by little building the Voice into a reliable, credible broadcast operation with objectivity and balance. And I first went from chief of the newsroom, which was obviously a major job, to being assistant program manager for policy, replacing the monitor that the State Department had put on us when we were part of the State as an independent agency we'd quote our own policy guidance. And then in '56 became program manager. One of the reasons was George Allen had been director of

Voice of America, career foreign service ambassador who was ultimately ambassador to five countries, and insisted on the expansion worldwide VOA English. The director of the Voice then who was a good friend, Bob Button out of NBC, didn't move fast enough for George Allen's taste. He was not outwardly resisting but was very slow in responding and so he got removed. He was asked to resign and he resigned.

RV: When you say he was slow in responding what do you mean?

BZ: He didn't move fast enough in increasing worldwide English and didn't expand it fast enough.

RV: I see.

BZ: The program manager, he was the one who made me program manager, replacing himself with me so he was almost on the assignment. He had come from WOR (Weekly Operating Report) and from the European Marshall Plan. But at any rate, '56 to '61 Bob Button went through, a fellow named Henry Loomis who was a very fine guy became director of the Voice of America. I was program manager but it was my job basically to change the Voice of America from as I said, a "propaganda instrument" to a credible worldwide radio program to rival what we saw as our great competition, BBC.

RV: Now, was this permissible, Barry, for you to kind of shift this whole direction?

BZ: Oh yeah. This is where the process—it took a lot of starts and steps forward and steps back but I think the Eisenhower administration endorsed that concept as did a growing number of people in the line of command in the area and even people at the State Department, although we continued to have arguments with State about particular news developments.

RV: Sure.

BZ: But it was accepted and carried forward. A fellow named Alan Heil has done a history of the Voice fairly recently, about a year ago it was published, that cites that approach. It was endorsed heavily by Ed Murrow being appointed director of USIA. Voice of America came under him and his emphasis on objectiveness. But five years in that job my string was running out. Henry Loomis, the new director, who was a very first-rate guy and a good friend nevertheless as director wanted to run more of it than his predecessors did and this cut somewhat into my own role and I finally decided to get out

of it and was attracted by the Foreign Service. So shortly after the Kennedy administration came in—among the things that I had done as chief of the newsroom was cover some overseas events, the Bandung Conference, the Korean War, but among the people I met in the course of those things was a guy named Don Wilson who had been *Life* magazine bureau chief and then became deputy to Ed Murrow. He was active in the Kennedy campaigns. His wife was Bobby Kennedy's wife's roommate in college. At any rate, Don and through him, Murrow, offered me Foreign Service at a fairly high level. So May of 1961 I accepted an assignment and joined up with the USIA Foreign Service as deputy public affairs officer in India where we had been giving a lot of aid in agricultural products assistance. We had an office that was paid for by the host country in its own currency so we had rupees, Indian rupees coming out of our ears and we had the biggest USIA program in the world there. We had branch posts in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi and the central staff had all kinds of operations. So it was a very big assignment to which Margaret agreed and our boys were about the right age. They'd been born in '53 and '55 so they were six and eight or six and nine. We took off, landed in New Delhi on Pan American. There were two Pan American flights and they always hit New Delhi in the middle of the night so that they would hit Europe or Asia in daylight hours. We landed in New Delhi after a leisurely trip through west Europe, Lebanon, Iran, in the middle of the night on July 23, 1961. I know the date because it was the day of our son's birthday. We were met by some old friends, a couple from the VOA days who were serving there, and went on until February of '64. In my case, two and a half years and in my wife's case it was the summer of '64. A very exciting two and a half or three years in India. First Foreign Service post, India still had a lot of touches then of the Kipling image. It wasn't too far from independence but still had all that color and drama of the mirage and so we had a very enjoyable time. We traveled throughout India, enjoyed the work while in foreign policy terms we were having some problems with India competing with Russia. John Foster Dulles reneged on a promise of a big dam project in India we were trying to mend fences. I worked actually for a very exciting ambassador, John Kenneth Galbraith who spent two years there in India, Kennedy's ambassador, and for a long time did not have a PAO (Public Affairs Officer) there. The one who had been earmarked for it went off to a different assignment. His replacement,

an old friend, Bill Weathersby, didn't come out for quite a while so I was acting PAO. I got along well with Galbraith who was a type who liked you and thought well of you it could be very exciting work. If he didn't think you had very much he had very little patience with what he regarded as incompetence and he would make life hell. But it was a very exciting period in our lives.

RV: It sounds like it. Before we move into details on India I'd like to talk to you a little bit more about VOA, just a couple of different subjects. Some things are happening then. One, you mention the Korean War. Tell me about that. You did cover that personally.

BZ: I did cover it. The Korean War began in '50, if you remember. I was I guess still in the English division. No, no, this was about—yes, I was still in the English division then. I wanted to go out and cover it. The management of VOA didn't think we should be covering a war as such but when it seemed to be ending, and if you remember, McArthur was getting near, the outcome of the war seemed to be almost over. There had been a number of other countries that had sent contingents to Korea. I was authorized to go cover largely these other countries, not American forces, for material for broadcasts by VOA to their countries. So in December of 1950 I landed in Tokyo with handheld recording equipment, along with the chief of our Korean section, the Voice of America's Korean section, to cover the war. And I remember we stayed that first night at what was then the Tokyo press club. And there was a notice on the bulletin board saying, "General Macarthur's headquarters announced today they have captured two soldiers on the Ilo River who said they were Chinese." We went a couple of days over to Korea. I went about my job but among the places—about a month later we were up in Pyongyang and a couple of days later we were chasing the hell out of Pyongyang down the road to the set of guards with about a million Chinese chasing us. So the plan to cover the post-war period in Korean and the third country contingents never came through. Obviously the war picked up. I did cover the third country forces, French, Turkish, Filipino, etc, etc. As a matter of fact, being of Armenian background was interesting. I went to cover the Turkish units that were there. That later gave a very good account of itself in a battle with the North. The Turks who like many Middle Easterners who liked to talk at length, I set up my recording equipment, the soldiers stood in line, they were told they were

being interviewed for broadcast back home. I handed the mike to the first one with a, "Hi, how are you," sort of question. He started talking, he went on, he turned the mike back to the next one, I had all I could do to keep replacing the tapes. I didn't get that mike back for about an hour. But then that material was broadcast. I was using my name then. I hadn't changed it legally, Barooyr Zorthian, and Turkish newspapers ran the full transcripts attributed to me by name, obviously Armenian background. It was the first time anyone with that kind of a name broke into the Turkish press. (Laughs) But I spent I guess four or five months in Korea and then was replaced by another representative of the Voice. One reason I had to get back, I had started law school in the fall of '50, NYU (New York University) Law School at night. When I was assigned to Korea I took a semester off and I was in Korea for that semester but had to return in time to start the next semester or I would have lost that whole law school. I made up that missed semester by going to school the next two summers. It was all at night while I was still the chief of the newsroom at the Voice.

RV: Why did you decide to go to law school?

BZ: I don't know. Always had had an interest in it. I think I said this before. It was either law or journalism. The GI Bill of Rights was there. I was recently married to Margaret and now we're living in New York not too far from NYU School of Law. We were town in Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan. I didn't know how long the Voice would take me and what kind of a future it had and that I ought to get to law school and maybe shift professions and become a lawyer. And it was possible to do it, to go to night law school. Margaret was very supportive. I would study, study, study all night and then go do my VOA work and then go back to school again. And night law school at NYU was very good but it was sort of set up and designed for people who had full daytime jobs. But at any rate, I did cover Korea. Later, as chief of the newsroom I assigned myself to cover the Bandung Conference which was held in Indonesia. It was the conference of the Third World major powers. Nehru was there, Tito, Nasser, Sukarno of Indonesia and they were joined by Zhou Enlai of China. Russia and the U.S. were not invited.

RV: Did you get to interview these individuals?

BZ: I interviewed some of them. They were not all that friendly about USIA. They weren't hostile to Voice of the America or the United States. It was very definitely

an effort to declare independence of the U.S. and of Russian government but our close friends there were from the Philippines, Romulo, who was foreign minister of the Philippines, was there, Sihanouk of Cambodia was there, of all people. There were a number of others. It was quite a conference. Salem Sarpar of Turkey was there. I keep thinking of various major people. The Brits and the French and the Italians, the Western allies weren't.

RV: Who did you interview of any of those? Could you describe any of them in more detail?

BZ: Well, Sarpar for one was very good. It was less interview and it was less individual than recording press conferences say that the various people had, and they all did have press conferences, including Zhou Enlai, which I remember recording. He was a personable person, Zhou Enlai, as against Mao Tse-tung, who was such a committed almost icon for the Chinese country. Zhou Enlai was quite friendly to his colleagues at that meeting.

RV: How would you describe him personally just from watching him interact?

BZ: Well, I remember writing a piece on him and he was dressed in a gray uniform, a gray dove of peace was the image he was passing out. Remember that the Chinese had been active in the Korean War but they were trying to restore their ties with the other Third World countries or to strengthen their ties so he was very forthcoming and very friendly.

RV: What about any of the other major players?

BZ: Well, Nasser was there. Nasser was emerging as a Third World force and Nehru of course was the great giant, worldwide reputation and so on and he was, if you will, one of the stars of the conference. Nehru was caught between the U.S. and Russia. He wanted to maintain his independence.

RV: Well, Zhou Enlai, he survived an assassination attempt on the way to the conference.

BZ: On the way to the Bandung Conference?

RV: Yes.

BZ: Well, if so, that's one I do not remember but I don't doubt it. But that would not have been in Indonesia, I don't think. Maybe.

RV: No, it was not. What about any of the other—?

BZ: Tito, of course.

RV: Yes, Tito.

BZ: He was communist and was an important figure. He was declaring his independence. He had broken with Stalin, set up the Yugoslav Communist Party as an independent party, not subject to Russian direction. So he was a major figure. Sukarno had led Indonesia to independence from the Dutch and Indonesia was such a big country in terms of population so he was a major figure. Sukarno had visited the U.S.; Nehru had certainly visited the U.S. Nasser, I don't remember but he probably did. Tito I guess had not visited. But at the conference, as I said, I'm not sure that it accomplished anything lasting but we refused to attend even as observers. The only one who went of note or of public note was Adam Clayton Powell, the congressman from New York who was a bit of a maverick. Not a bit of, but a considerable maverick. He attended as an observer but our only presence there was our embassy and a few people like me covering it. A lot of American journalists were there.

RV: Well, it had to have been incredibly interesting for you as a young man to be right there in the presence of all these world leaders at this crucial time.

BZ: Oh yeah. It was just a great occasion. I fed stories to the central news desk and I took advantage of that trip. In the old days, if you got to Bangkok it was regarded as halfway around the world and you could come back either way so on that particular trip I took advantage of every stop over I could and I think visited something like twenty-one countries to check on reception of VOA and what kind of a reputation and so on. I went to Saigon for the first time then. General Collins was in charge. I went to Bangkok, India, Calcutta, Bombay, Karachi. I didn't get to Afghanistan. Twice the plane from Karachi took off to get to Afghanistan and before it left the airport had to turn around because of defects or some mechanical problem with the plane. I decided after the second one that somebody was trying to tell me not to go any further (laughs) so I went on to Tehran and Jordan, Damascus, et cetera, et cetera.

RV: Wow. What did Saigon look like in 1955 when you stopped there?

BZ: Well, it was in the middle of one of the challenges to Ngo Dinh Diem, which General Collins stopped and intervened with his forces there and sort of rescued them.

This was fairly shortly after the 1954 Geneva Agreement, which put them in power. But Saigon was then still physically still pretty much the old French city with Tamarind trees and so on and without this wartime atmosphere being completely pervasive. By the time I got there in the sixties the war had taken over. Saigon in its prime I gather was a lovely, lovely city. They called it the Paris of the East.

RV: Right. Would you agree with that?

BZ: Well, I didn't see it quite in that pristine condition but what I saw of it was fine. As a city the atmosphere and the setting was just great. The wartime hustle and bustle had gotten to it.

RV: Let me ask you a couple questions if you don't mind about the presidents that you served with and served around during this early time in your career. First, tell me your impressions of Dwight Eisenhower.

BZ: Well, they were distant. I met him at the fifteenth anniversary of the Voice of America in '57 when I was program manager. I sort of was one of the ones welcoming him to the Voice and then took him around to our people but hardly a very close tie to him.

RV: Sure. How about general impressions of him?

BZ: The general impression is that he was very well balanced. You didn't think of him the way you would of McArthur as a general, as a hardnosed military type. You thought of Eisenhower much more, to me at least, as a fairly balanced statesman. He was heavily criticized at times. You know, the VOA newsroom in '52 when Eisenhower was first elected, was criticized by a couple of political management types as being too pro-Stevenson, Adlai Stevenson, and I guess most of us were sympathetic with Stevenson. He was a very attractive, articulate, if you will progressive type. Eisenhower was not that articulate. He was not that personable on political issues but you thought of him as a good, solid Midwestern American in the old image. The people around him, Dulles, his secretary of state was much more hardnosed. You worried about Dulles. Obviously he was under Eisenhower's, if you will, umbrella, but how much Eisenhower really ran Dulles is a different question. You tended to think about Dulles leading us into some of the difficulties we had in the fifties but Eisenhower, if you remember, was resistant and I think wisely so in rescuing the French in Vietnam. He did not send troops there. He

stood firm on the Suez War. The attack by the Israelis was worthy of French backing. He was low-key in many ways but also a very, very astute and wise guy.

RV: Okay. What about John Foster Dulles?

BZ: I had absolutely no personal contact with him. His image to me in the fifties was as a very conservative, quite hardnosed, knowledgeable yes, but almost too, what shall I say, aggressive in his personal reactions to foreign issues. His brother, Allen Dulles, head of the CIA seemed in a way much better balanced. Now, that same statement is coming from me. John Foster Dulles has been sort of a key figure in the establishment of what his law firm, Sullivan and Cromwell, for years and years and years. The Council of Foreign Relations group—I guess he was one of them but he seemed to be the more hardnosed one of them in that whole group, that post-World War II, essentially Republican control of foreign policy. What was his name? I knew it better than my own, the former commissioner to Germany and so on. I'll think of it but go ahead.

RV: So looking at Dulles and Eisenhower in that administration, as far as Voice of America, how much of a hand did they have in this?

BZ: Dulles didn't want any part of this strange creature called Voice of America or international information programs. He disowned it under the McCarthy period. He said, "That's not our thing." I think he probably, not that I know, encouraged Eisenhower to pull it out of State. Dulles wanted to engage in diplomacy and he didn't want these strange new things called public diplomacy and international broadcast journalism so he got rid of it as fast as he could and I'm not sure he ever accepted it as part of the nation's arsenal in dealing with foreign countries. He was an old-line foreign policy professional in his own way.

RV: Right. What did you think of the Eisenhower administration's handling of the Suez Crisis?

BZ: I thought that was one of his finer moments of providing some balance and some, if you will endorsement of the U.S. as a referee, as the middleman. Now, I suppose the ardent supporters of Israel would say they were wrong to stop it but I don't think so. I think Eisenhower did the right thing there.

RV: Okay, all right. What about interactions with John Kennedy and his administration?

BZ: Well, my interactions were limited. At one point in one of these Washington diplomatic receptions I met John Kennedy and Jackie and shook their hands but that was it. My ties to him were through Dan Wilson to Bobby Kennedy. Bobby Kennedy's wife and Don Wilson's wife were roommates. I remember meeting at one point in Bobby Kennedy's office in the Justice Department, the attorney general's office. We were all high on the Kennedy's. This was a New England Ivy League one. I had a couple of friends who had been in Kennedy's wedding, Charles Bartlett, and what's his name? But at any rate, this was of our period at Yale and Harvard in the late thirties and early forties. Chuck Spalding was the other one who was in Kennedy's wedding and who was a friend. So they were very high on them and at that point I was still if not registered, in mindset a Democrat.

RV: When you said all of you were kind of high on the Kennedy's, what was it that you guys were high on about them? What was different?

BZ: Well, their youth, their approach, their fresh image against the old-line Northeastern Republicans. Today I would say I'm a Nelson Rockefeller Northeastern Republican but then we were John F. Kennedy, our generation Northeastern Democrats.

RV: I see. Did you meet and work with Robert Kennedy?

BZ: I met him. Worked with him would be too strong a word but I met him, attended a couple of meetings with him. Remember I was not long in Washington in the Kennedy administration.

RV: Right, you were out rather soon.

BZ: They came in January of '61 and I ended up in India or really started going there in May and June of '61.

RV: What was your impression of Bobby Kennedy, just the brief time that you were around him?

BZ: I had a certain reservation about Bobby Kennedy and to some extent I just said some positive things about the Kennedy's but to some extent about the Kennedy's generally. Bobby Kennedy was the minority council, the Roy Cohn and by extension, Schine, in the McCarthy hearings. Bobby Kennedy was the counsel to the Democratic

members of that committee. Stu Symington, Scoop Jackson, what was his name from Arkansas on the Republican side, Carl Mundt was there and a couple of them. But Bobby Kennedy did not oppose McCarthian ideas. Note for you that whether it was the influence of his father or not, John Kennedy was sick in bed when the vote on McCarthy was held. So their record on that particular area was not all that good. On the other hand, in later years, once into Saigon, I flew back to Washington on some leave with General Taylor, Max Taylor, who was close to the Kennedy's. In fact, Bobby Kennedy and Ethel named one of his sons after Max Taylor and I was invited out to dinner at Hickory Hill. Since I was number two in rank then I sat at the table with Bobby Kennedy while Max Taylor sat with Ethel. This was early in the Vietnam War but Bobby Kennedy gave me a very hard time. I was the only one there from Vietnam. He gave me a very hard time about the war. Rollie Evans was there, a couple of other guys, and the next day I was in Art Sylvester's office at the Pentagon. He was then assistant secretary for public affairs and his secretary came in and said, "Senator Kennedy is on the telephone looking for you." I picked up the phone and Bobby Kennedy apologized to me. He said, "People I admire, Rollie Evans and so on, say you're a good guy and I gave you an unreasonably hard time last night for which I apologize." I respect that he did it. One of my very good friends, Warren Rogers, of *Look Magazine*, *Hearst*, *Paris International [Herald] Tribune* and so on, who was very close to Bobby Kennedy was in the Los Angeles assassination thing and an admirer of Bobby and Ethel told me once, we were very good friends for a long time. Bobby grew and grew and grew from his early McCarthy period days to the day he was assassinated. So I accept that but my personal contacts with Bobby Kennedy early on were not very favorable.

RV: What did he say to you that night, do you remember, when he gave you such a hard time?

BZ: "Why are we in Vietnam? What are we doing there? We're supporting Diem, a dictator, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera," and this was the anti-LBJ period. JFK had been assassinated, LBJ was in charge, he was being really badgered by the Vietnam politicians and Bobby was very critical, as were many others. It was a growing thing. Remember Bobby ran his presidential campaign that year on criticism of LBJ for his Vietnam policies.

RV: Yes. Okay. While we're on this topic people that you ran into, this is pre-India. Anyone else in the Eisenhower administration that you want to comment on, that you feel was important to your career or to the Voice of America or made a serious impression on you?

BZ: Well, Arthur Larson, who was reportedly a favorite of President Eisenhower, and was talked about the possibility of being a vice president with Richard Nixon. Arthur Larson later became dean of the law school at Duke but he had come in as director of USIA. He was all right but I didn't think very highly of him. There was a very brief period at the Voice where Saturday evenings we would have social occasions and I must say in all candor, Larson was making passes at a young Korean staff member, Moon Kim, a very attractive young lady technically under my supervision, a wife of one of our studio engineers, Paul Kim. And I didn't think very much of the way he handled himself. I think he was weak and soft and certainly did not command very high respect. Because he was director of the agency a lot of people at those parties sort of kissed up to him. I didn't antagonize him but I hope I maintained my integrity. He was one—Abbot Washburn, his deputy for a long time, was a guy I did admire and in later years he joined the Federal Communication Commission. Who else, who else, who else? Probably others will come to mind but those were the immediates. Leonard Marks who just died the other day was outside the government then. Later he came in under LBJ. Now offhand I sort of hesitate to announce this. I'll probably make a note and say next time I'll talk about someone else.

RV: Okay. I'll make a note of that. Again, pre-India, when you left Washington and it was a huge transition time in the country as far as the presidency, what was happening, the energy level that you've noted, did you see the United State's position in the world as growing, as staying even, or declining? How did you see us as we interacted in the world at that point?

BZ: At that in the sixties it was tough. I guess I won't say we were declining but we were barely holding our own. Remember in the early sixties you go from area to area. In Indonesia they'd had that, what would you call it, the overturn of the Chinese? We had the Vietnamese problem, things were getting difficult in Thailand, Korea was under military dictatorship, China was starting on its cultural revolution, you went into the

Middle East and the Russians were pushing Syria, helping them in others. In Western Europe, I don't know, my timing may be off but we were going through that whole purging weapons period of doubts as to whether we could place them. Italy had communism infiltrating the government; France had the same thing. It was a rough period for the United States.

RV: Yes. Did you think that Eisenhower had made a good decision supporting the French moving back into Vietnam?

BZ: Well, supporting French but not putting in troops. Eisenhower, remember, that speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors said, "No way are we going to put in troops." And I thought that was the right decision. Now remember I'm a very junior officer in this period, Richard, and you may accept or understand or even support decisions but it takes a degree of arrogance to say, "I know better."

RV: Okay. Well, tell me about Margaret and her thoughts of moving to India and really changing lives here.

BZ: Well, we were not Foreign Service types. My interest in international affairs was real but we had long discussions and decided to take the chance and I was attracted, there's no doubt, about the possibilities. And India was a good assignment, well regarded in terms of agency attractions. I didn't have a fluent foreign language so continental Europe was probably out. My French was very limited and still is so we looked forward to India. As I said earlier it was a great, great experience. Not only did I learn professionally, it was good for the family. For our sons it skipped a lot of those years where you could go wrong. We were very involved in the foreign community in India. In India the diplomatic community as contrasted to posts like Paris or London is very close-knit and cohesive. I used to say you might as well have the same reception every night in my den and simply put up posters as to who's sponsoring it tonight because you'd see the same people almost every night. The American embassy community was close-knit. Americans there in business commercial were fairly limited. There was a nice media contingent. Those were the days when India rated resident correspondents. The networks had them leading mainstream newspapers, *Times*, *Post*, et cetera, had them, *Time* magazine, *Newsweek* magazine, and wire services. I've forgotten the exact number but we had something like twelve resident American correspondents with whom we

worked in a very close relationship. The U.S. was trying to establish under John Kenneth Galbraith better relations with India. We had a big AID (Agency for International Development) program based on the rupees India gave us. We did things like we once chartered a train to travel. Trains are big in India, or were then. We traveled through India to AID projects with a whole train carload of Indian correspondents so it was a very active and in some ways exciting life. On a personal side we traveled throughout India down in Madras and Bangalore and Trivandrum and up to Calcutta and over to Bombay and up through the Kashmir where we took vacations and up to Lahar. You could cross over to Pakistan then. We went to the Khyber Pass and down to Karachi. It was all very, very great. We enjoyed it tremendously.

RV: Transitioning into the Foreign Service, what was the mission of the Foreign Service as you understood it there in 1961? You had your particular specific job you're going into but what was the U.S. Foreign Service supposed to be doing for the United States?

BZ: Well, Foreign Service to the extent we could do it was to strengthen relations between India and the United States. Remember in '61 it is still Nehru's India.

RV: Right.

BZ: You asked earlier had I met him. I met Nehru. I have a great picture with him. It was important enough for Galbraith to get Jackie Kennedy to visit India on a memorable visit. It was important enough that when India had that confrontation with China in '62 right in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis here when obviously the White House and State's attention was focused on Cuba, Galbraith was able to get through and get the administration to send out support of India in the face of China and I've never forgotten flying down to Calcutta on an embassy plane along with a number of the American correspondents to welcome these huge C-130 planes coming in from the States disgorging all kinds of assistance to India. That's what helped our relations with India. Prior to that we'd face problems like the Ministry of Defense playing footsie with the Russians and so on but these were not confrontation but competitive between the U.S. and Russia in India and I think in that period the U.S. did very well and won, if you will, although that's a hard thing to measure.

RV: Tell me your thoughts about India in ’60, ’61, and ’62 trying to position itself and keeping a position between the Soviet Union and the United States and how successful was it? And this is right upon your arrival. Basically where was the Indian government in this game when you got there?

BZ: Well, India was in the middle of neutrality. I’m not sure we had handled it all that well. Remember in the late fifties and early sixties we had that, if you will, tilting may be the right word towards Pakistan. George Allen, who was ambassador to India then, the same George Allen who had been at USIA and Ellsworth Bunker who was ambassador to India, had that difficult problem of justifying to India military assistance to Pakistan. How we’d overcome to some extent that tilting, that bias? But Dulles had vetoed the so called Bhopal Dam, a big project that was supposed to help India’s power needs and irrigation needs and so on. India had gone through a famine period. We came through on the positive side with PL480. George McGovern had been head of it, for which we insisted they pay and they did in rupees so we went into India in the early sixties under Kennedy. There was a gap there. Ellsworth Bunker left as ambassador before Galbraith came. Under Kennedy there was a lot of India domestic assets called PL480 funds and under Galbraith’s influence, as well as here in the States, a more positive attitude towards India. Nehru was still in office but Nehru determined to maintain his middle ground. We undertook a very extensive AID program, started technical universities, A&M (Agricultural and Mechanical) universities. India, when we got there, Margaret and I and others, had four hundred and fifty million people. The old timers said, “Well, you should have been here when it was two hundred and fifty million,” but they had just gone through famine. They hadn’t been able to feed four hundred and fifty million people. We had helped them feed it. Today India has whatever it is, 1.1 billion people. They’re not only feeding them all, they’re exporting food. While we were there the Carnegie Foundation, Ralph Cummings was the head of it, were bringing in miracle rice. We were founding universities; we were on a good kick. Sure, there were flaws but we helped them with the Chinese front, confronting the Chinese, and we were generally, and I think Ken Galbraith can get a lot of sympathy for this as well as the State Department, Dean Ruskin and so on. Remember Chet Bowles who was deputy secretary of state there was finally farmed out. I worked for Chet Bowles for six months.

He was a wonderful guy but I'm not sure tough enough for the Indian problem but maybe he was right for India. But we've done well in India since then and now more recently of course we're strengthening our ties to India, in some minds as a counterbalance to China and in some minds a marriage on its own but India and the U.S., if they're not a formal alliance they are forming some kind of a relationship.

RV: Okay. Barry, you want to call it a day for now?

BZ: Yeah.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 5 of 11
August 22, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is August 22, 2006. It's a little after 9:00 AM Central Standard Time and I am in Lubbock, Texas and Barry is again in Washington, D.C. Barry, before we move into India I'd like to revisit just a couple of points about Voice of America. You had talked about some exciting times, some high points, and a lot of transition that was going on and that you helped implement a lot of this transition from kind of the propaganda and give the United State's view on everything to a respectable, credible news source. Did you think that you all reached success with that? How did that go, looking back?

Barry Zorthian: Well, we did reach success, I think. We did change it over the years. I think it was sort of culminated in the VOA charter, which put an official stamp on the approach we had in mind. It received support up and down the line. It was not easy. The language desk particularly, through the pattern of "anticommunism" in the early post-World War II days had to change their outlook and so on. Remember many of those languages were staffed with people who were exiles, who had left their countries under the pressure of communism and were broadcasting back to it but had so many ties to those countries. So it was a difficult period. But it all started really in New York. One of the things that we started was "Music USA." That was before I was program manager but "Music USA" became a tremendous success with the audience under the program management of Will S. Conover who became very well known behind the Iron Curtain, playing the best of American music, American jazz, Louis Armstrong and that whole era. But we also followed it up with other things. The news was very important to make it credible, accurate, and balanced. We started "American Theater of the Air," the best of American plays, Saroyan, Tennessee Williams and many of the others, with professional casts on radio. We started "America University of the Air," half hour talks aimed at intellectuals, aimed at scholars, aimed at scientists by specialists in all the fields we could think of. Those talks were then published and distributed on request to many people overseas. We started the special "English." Not teaching English but using a

limited vocabulary, fifteen hundred words plus place names and so on, but fifteen hundred words to provide the news, to report the news. This became very popular as people around the world wanted to learn English and this was one of the ways they were able to do it and to get the news in English. English usually had more credibility than language programs, simply because people figured, audiences figured, that was our home language, our native language, and Americans overseas would listen and we would be more careful than in the language services to provide an accurate, balanced program.

RV: Right.

BZ: So this went on. It took a number of years. We had to put restraints on the freedom of the language desks, which had been in the past, able to design almost their own content of the programs with political aims, anticommunist goals in mind or whatever problems were affecting the receiving country. We centralized news control, put out a standard newscast for each area each day, variations only with authorization from the central news desk. And that led to some conflicts and so on. Some of the old bulls in the language services simply did not like the new restraints.

RV: What did you do with the people?

BZ: What did I do with what?

RV: What did you do with the old bulls, as you said?

BZ: Well some of them began to retire. They were just that age. But they came around. You know, after I came back from Vietnam I visited the Voice a couple of times and one of my favorite stories is there was a very fine guy named Paul Nadanyi who was head of the Hungarian desk and when I was program manager if I'd see him in the hallway and say, "How's it going, Paul?" He'd say, "Oh, we got those damn communists today. I did a story on this." After I came back from Vietnam Paul was still around and I literally did say to him one day as we passed across, "How's it going, Paul?" "Oh, things are wonderful. My granddaughter just got into college. I've been taking vacations in the U.S., I have friends over here, life is very good." There was a whole change but gradually as we went on. Now the Cold War was still very intense but nevertheless we were able to make these changes at the Voice.

RV: Tell me about some of the other high points you had at Voice of America. You went to Moscow, didn't you?

BZ: Well, in 1956, Khrushchev in power or that period, there was a period of "the thaw" and I'd been wanting to go to Moscow to go behind the curtain to again get readings on both reception and audience for the Voice and with authority from USIA directors and so on I applied for visas and was the first officially acknowledged Voice of America official to be granted a visa to visit Moscow. With that I also got visas for Prague and Budapest. The Poles turned down my request and Romania turned down my request. But the other three countries gave me official permission and it was a fantastic trip for that period. I stayed in Prague. I never did get to Poland on that trip. I went to Moscow, flew in. We had what was called a cultural affairs officer there then. They welcomed me. I was at a point where if I'm not mistaken Bohlen, Charles Bohlen, had been declared persona non grata for some comments he had made in Washington. He had then gone to Berlin and they wouldn't let him back in so the number two ambassador, his number two man in the embassy in Moscow, was in charge. The American colony at that time was very small. It was not sequestered but concentrated in apartment buildings that were limited to foreigners. There were some correspondents there I had known from other connections but also got to know. Dan Schor was in Moscow then. The head of the AP was a fellow with Armenian background, Roy Essoyan, the AP bureau chief in Moscow. I called on him, I talked to Dan and a few others but Roy said to me one day, "What are you doing tonight?" And I said, "Nothing that I know of." He said, "Well, there's a reception at the Indonesian embassy for Sukarno who is visiting Moscow. Come on along." So I did and we were inside—this was a compound, a walled compound. We were inside the compound. I was paying my respects to the charge, the American charge. Right near that gate—I haven't been able to get over it—when the gates of the compound opened and there was the entire politburo coming to pay their respects to Sukarno who was the leader of Indonesia of course and they were trying to butter him up. In walked Malenkov and even Beria was there, Khrushchev was there and our good Armenian minister, Mikoyan was there. They all came in, were walking by me. With my facial expression they didn't know whether I was Indonesian or not. So they all got in line and greeted me and shook hands, the entire politburo. They just wanted to be sure they didn't make a faux pas.

RV: Right. So you shook Khrushchev's hand. What was he like? What was his presence like?

BZ: Well, in person they were a reflection of what you see in pictures. Khrushchev was a dumpy little man. He wasn't very tall, he was heavyset, his clothes were not well tailored and so on. Mikoyan, who was really from Georgia and close to Stalin, was still in the politburo then and he came by a bit of a smart ass in those days. I said in Armenian to him, "Mr. Minister, what's a nice Armenian boy like you doing in this?" (Laughs) He didn't laugh. He didn't say a thing.

RV: He didn't. (Laughs)

BZ: Roy Essoyan told me later I should have asked him for permission to go to Armenia, which they did not permit at that time, certainly no one from the Voice of America. But I passed up that chance. But that deal in Moscow was just great.

RV: So your impression of the politburo was they weren't well tailored, they were there as a formality, and they weren't very personable?

BZ: No, they weren't personable. These were not (laughs) Hollywood stars.

RV: (Laughs) I know.

BZ: These were the survivors of the thirties and World War II, they were classic Russians or other nationalities, Ukrainian and so on, but very stern expressions on their face. This was no backslapping, happy-go-lucky political type.

RV: Did you get to meet Sukarno? Did you talk to Sukarno?

BZ: Well, you know, there's a formal reception receiving line we went through, sure. But Sukarno, I had—I'm trying to remember whether it was before the Moscow trip or later—also visited Washington and I think I'd gone to the Indonesian embassy reception for him here. So he wasn't new in that sense.

RV: Barry, can you describe Moscow in 1955? What was it like?

BZ: Well, I guess inevitably you'd think it was dark and under a cloud. The particular days I was there, which would have been early fall, early September, were not sunny days. Moscow itself and obviously an awful lot of buildings both inside and outside were if not decrepit they certainly were not in prime condition. The mood in the city was not upbeat or the feeling you got. I stayed; as did everyone else, at the hotel—I am forgetting but the hotel on Red Square that everyone stayed in, the old hotel, and that

was dark inside and not a very pleasant place. The mood was almost the scenes of the worst images of communism, of life with communism. There didn't seem to be much in the stores and so on.

RV: What about the people?

BZ: Well, I didn't see that many of the people except people on the street and people walking around and this was not Fifth Avenue or Piccadilly Circle and so on. The people were dark, they were not particularly stylishly dressed, you didn't see any signs of enjoyment of life. They seemed to be intent as they probably had to be on just getting along and making a living.

RV: What else did you get to do while you were there?

BZ: Well I also then took a train to Kiev on one of those European compartment-like trains. A Russian family, I'm sure not by accident, was placed with me as a military officer. We were in the same compartment. I went from Kiev through to—well, as I said earlier I didn't get a visa to Bucharest but there was a rule under which I think you could spend twenty-four hours as a layover in Bucharest, Romania and I got off the train there, registered in a hotel, reported into the embassy but had twenty-four hours in Bucharest in that central square over there. But then I went to Budapest where I did have a visa. I stayed in a hotel which about fifty years later I visited again, the Hotel Alcron. No, that's in Prague. In Budapest it was the Gellart Hotel, this old hotel, a pre-World War II hotel. But Hungary was a great visit but it was very tense and the Hungarian revolution and uprising of '56 took place about three weeks after I was there. I had spent a little bit of time in the Deepaj Café which was supposed to have been—I was in there for a drink and so on. But that was supposed to have been the base for the planners of the uprising movement. The Deepaj Café was one of the centers. It was still the day when I called on Harry Barnes, the American ambassador there. In his office when I went in to call on him he turned on the radio, it was just music or something, just to drown out our conversation, figuring he was being tapped somehow or another. So it was that kind of an atmosphere. I met some Hungarians. Budapest again seemed dark. The buildings were not clean. The red star was hung in an awful lot of places. These were not happy countries.

RV: Well, was there a difference between the people of Moscow and the people of Bucharest? Did you sense anything?

BZ: I'm not sure I got to see enough of them to really confirm that. Hungarians just physically tend to be a more attractive people; at least the ones on the street and Hungarian women are noted for their beauty. The area being the old Hungarian empire, military officers would go out in the provinces and sort of kidnap and bring the most beautiful women they could find into Budapest and marry them or whatever. But at any rate, that raised the level of the Hungarians, at least this is what Hungarians would say.

RV: Where else did you go besides Hungary and Kiev?

BZ: Well, those were the key places. Over the years I've been in every country in Europe.

RV: Oh, sure, sure. I'm talking about on this trip, kind of behind the Iron Curtain.

BZ: No, that was it. That was the Iron Curtain trip, Prague, Moscow, Ukraine, Romania, and Hungary. Poland I missed.

RV: Did your viewpoint of these countries behind the Iron Curtain, did it change any when you got back to Washington and went forward with your work for VOA?

BZ: Not really. I guess it tended to confirm the actual picture that life under communism was very grey and the government was very dominant and that the people involved, and I don't know what you'd base such a generalized judgment on, were certainly not receptive to these governments. They did not want to get out from under. And that of course was one of the reasons in contrast to today when our broadcasting was received so widely. We were broadcasting to an audience that wanted what we represented, freedom, a government that was not an oppressive government, et cetera. It was a very difficult situation these days.

RV: Anything else with VOA that you want to talk about, any other personalities or people you met that struck you and had influence on you then and going forward in your career?

BZ: Well, that list would be long. I had some good colleagues at VOA. Of the directors I guess Henry Loomis would be the one who had the most influence. We worked closely together although as I say, in a sense, I don't mean he did it in a sense of intrigue, Henry in effect pushed me out of the Voice simply because legitimately he was

director. He wanted to be running the show and that cut down my elbow room and led me finally to say, "Look, my time here is done."

RV: Well, let's move then to India when you took the job. I wanted to ask, and you've touched on this before a little bit, but could you describe in as much detail as you want to go into, John Kenneth Galbraith and who he was and what kind of person he was and what he was like to work with?

BZ: Well, the first thing one noticed about John Kenneth Galbraith was his height. I don't know whether he was actually, 6'8 I guess. Maybe 6'10. But he was a tall Scot and he always insisted it was Scot, not Scotch, from Canada who had come south of the border. He eventually ended up in academe but he came to Washington in World War II. I think he was the Office of Price Administration. He was head of the survey of bomb damage of Germany after the war. He went into teaching. He worked for a while even earlier in career for *Fortune* magazine. He worked for Harry Luce and he used to always say, "Harry Luce was the one who talked me into writing." But he also would also say, "I'm a writer, not an economist." That was the spiel but he took great pride in his writing and it was a very, very effective articulation of whatever it was he was trying to say. As I say, I had a period there when I was acting public affairs officer because Bill Weathersby, who came to be PAO, had not arrived, so it gave me a period to establish myself, not by choice necessarily, but with John Kenneth Galbraith. And there were many exciting parts to Ken Galbraith. He had a very real interest in publicizing and the work of the public appearance thing. He incidentally thought that the role of the ambassador, he could do it in the afternoons. He could stay in his residence in the mornings and write books. He's the only ambassador I know of anyone who in a two year tour in India got four or five books out of it. One of his great strengths in India was since he had been a professor as Dr. Galbraith; he delivered lectures within the universities with great pride and intellectuals really made almost an icon out of him. Nehru was prime minister then. He got a long well with Nehru. What Nehru really thought of him—they were two very different personalities—I don't know, but on the surface at least they got along pretty well. We had a lot of highlights in India on both the political side and cultural side. Jackie Kennedy and her sister, Lee Radziwill, stood for a very memorable evening. Galbraith visited her. It was a very memorable visit.

Galbraith made sure she was handled with first class, not holds barred. It turned out the whole mission.

RV: Can you tell me about that?

BZ: Well, she came in. This was at the height of her popularity. She was very, very effective with the Indians. John F. Kennedy was an Indian hero, one of the few cases where an American president's picture would be hung in ordinary Indian homes. I think the only prior one was probably Franklin D. Roosevelt. But at any rate the visit with her entourage, as I said, her sister and her publicist, was a great success socially. There was a first class reception, diplomatic dinners, the embassy decked out, and she went down to Jaipur. The maharani of Jaipur, who was a westernized Indian, a beautiful woman, young, wore mink coats in Delhi even in mild weather as part of the jet setting. A friend of Jackie, I guess from Europe, of French origin. Anyway, that was good. It made her happy and it was a period of sort of discernable improvement in U.S./India relations.

RV: When she visited?

BZ: Pardon me?

RV: When she visited or are you talking about in general?

BZ: Well, in general it helped improve U.S./Indian relations. Nehru was reportedly taken with her. I don't mean any improper sense but supposedly she had quite an effect on him. Then there were many more highlights in India.

RV: Of course. Barry, tell me about when you first got there. What was your first impression of the country and what your position was and what your individual mission would be?

BZ: Well, my individual mission was deputy public affairs officer number two and this was the biggest USIA-USIS (United States Information Service) program in the world. We had several hundred employees, Indians mostly, but also very large American staff there, basically because we had all these rupees from our PL480 Food for Peace programs. But with that kind of size, that kind of scope, the job, obviously second to the public affairs officer, was very active and in my eyes a satisfying job. I enjoyed it tremendously. We had a major media program. I think I said it was also my first exposure really to the American media overseas. Delhi then was a major post for

American media outlets. All three, ABC, NBC, CBS had correspondents there. The ABC correspondent incidentally was Lou Rukeyser who later became quite famous for his Wall Street program. But the three networks were there, *Time* magazine was there, *Newsweek* was there, *New York Times* was there, *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, AP, UPI all had full-time resident correspondents in Delhi. Now I don't know if there are three of them out there. They just don't operate that way. A lot of those correspondents later I met again in Vietnam. Harry Luce, the founder of *Time* magazine and *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*, et cetera, visited, and since Galbraith had worked for him and had high regard for him he went all out to show Harry Luce. Luce was active in the world conference of churches but he also paid a visit in effect to the embassy. I've never forgotten Galbraith taking him down and I, as the acting PAO, went on the trip, and Luce's *Time Magazine* correspondent there, a fellow named Charlie Mohr, M-o-h-r, who later became quite well known as a *New York Times* correspondent in Vietnam, went down sort of at Luce's camp. We went to Jaipur and visited the museum. Jaipur is a real raj city, if you will and the two of them then had a press conference. And while these were both very fine writers and articulate people, both were lousy speakers. Ken Galbraith would say to the press conference, "Oh, I've got some questions over here. Let me answer this. Harry Luce." And Harry Luce would say, "Well, I just can't thank you enough." It was a horrible press conference. Furthermore it was supposed to be off the record and I've never forgotten the next day reading in one of the newspapers the story, "Speaking off the record yesterday, Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith said the following." The first question that they asked Henry Luce, this great American media baron, intellectual statesmen, et cetera, "Tell me, Mr. Luce, what do you think of the Indian woman's sari?" This is the accent Indians have. Well, there was another thing. We took a train trip, I may have mentioned. Trains are big in India, certainly in that period. We piled on a lot of Indian reporters. I was sort of the PAO for the thing. John Kenneth Galbraith of course was visiting major USIAD (United States Agency for International Development) projects in India and we went literally around the country. And everywhere we went, because Galbraith's name was so widely known and respected, there'd be very significant crowds out at the railroad station to welcome the train and to see that American giant, John Kenneth Galbraith. The Indians, by and large, are not very

tall people and six foot eight, six foot ten, we used to hassle one of our staff and kid each other that like an old Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey train we ought to put a sign on it saying, "This train contains the tallest man in the world."

RV: (Laughs) So you had fun with it. Did Galbraith join in that fun?

BZ: Oh sure. (Laughs) He had a very dry sense of humor. I've got some great pictures of that period, two of us with turbans on our head after we were given them at one of these stops. But he was very deliberate, very conscious. He was putting on a show for the Indians, showing the American flag and as far as I can tell it did a lot of good. The big thing I guess in India, there were other things like that. He brought a cultural group over, the Joffrey Ballet I remember coming over, the embassy, the new embassy pool and embassy building was designed by Edward Durell Stone. It had a big pool behind it and I'll always remember the scene with the flower petals on the water in the pool and around the pool. The Joffrey Ballet—which was a new ballet then—young and very innovative, performed around the pool. It was just a great, great evening.

RV: Now was this something that you coordinated as public affairs officer?

BZ: Well, we would work. Our cultural affairs officer who was part of our staff would be the one really handling it but on this sort of thing Galbraith himself would get very involved and Mrs. Galbraith. They had a great interest. Another great visit and I was very close on this one, was Duke Ellington with his orchestra, one of the great visits of all time. Again, Bill Weathersby was out of the country or something so I was in charge. They came down from Afghanistan. It was Afghanistan back then. They landed and at the airport the Indian press was out there to greet Duke Ellington whose name was widely known and as I stood next to him and introduced him and he started speaking, I look up and there in the back of the crowd of reporters was a very attractive, tall blond in obviously Paris fashion clothing. I said to myself, "Uh, oh." She'd come in with the commercial flight. I said, "Uh, oh. This is trouble." And sure enough, it was.

RV: Why?

BZ: She was what today you would call a groupie. She was following Ellington all around and I guess they were having an affair all around the trip. The Indians at least publicly have pretty high moral standards on that sort of thing. Privately it's something else. The Karma Sutra is the famous Indian book on sex. But at any rate I had to—it was

a very embarrassing thing—tell Ellington's sort of manager, "Listen, he's got to keep that woman out of sight because Indians just will not accept it." Ellington was put off enough, not that he made a crisis out of it, he got sick. I think it was a diplomatic illness and he couldn't take the orchestra south. One of his chief assistants took the orchestra down. Ellington went to the hospital. He gave his concerts in New Delhi. They were an enormous success and he was quite a guy. We got along well. But he went to the hospital for two or three days but he insisted he had to have steak. He was a big steak fan. Indians don't have beef. They have water buffalo at best. They called it steak; Ellington wouldn't cater to that. I literally had to send to Karachi where the U.S. Air Force had a commissary that had steak. I had to tell Karachi, "Please ship steak up to New Delhi for Duke Ellington," which they did. We took Ellington out shopping. He bought a lot of Indian jewelry. His biography has a picture in it of our two sons with the Duke. How old was Steve then, about nine, and Greg may be twelve, but that visit is memorialized as I said in that book. So that was a major thing.

RV: What was Ellington like personally?

BZ: A very decent guy who got along well. He had all the trumpets; you know the temperament of a musician and of an artist but a personable appearance and couldn't be nicer certainly to us.

RV: Okay, so a Jackie Kennedy visit, a Duke Ellington visit, what other non-diplomatic visits?

BZ: Angie Dickinson came. She was an old friend of John Kenneth Galbraith. Kenneth Galbraith had insisted on one thing, that there was a plane at his disposal because India was such a big country. So the naval attaché had a DC—what was it, not a three but one of the larger DC, Douglass planes—available and Ken would every so often go up and commanders it to the southern provinces or up north or wherever. We did vacations in Kashmir. Kashmir was quiet then and a beautiful, beautiful part of the world. Also in the hill country where the Brits had schools, Goda Canal, we traveled all around from Bombay and Madras to Calcutta. I've been back to Bangalore. It was just a great, great three years, which we enjoyed. I enjoyed the Indian people. I think they got along and accepted me and the family. Greg was a favorite of the Marines at the embassy compound. We had a great residence that had belonged to the Nawab Bahawalpur in the

raj days. It was built—he had the main house but in back was the building for his four wives and it was built for four different compartments. When the Indians got independence and the whole maharajas lost their power he gave up the building. It became the U.S. embassy and the one we lived in was the deputy's home. Then when the new U.S. embassy and the diplomatic compound was developed USIA took over both the main building and the Nawab's wives' building and we as deputy got it as our residence. It had a beautiful yard outside for al fresco dining, neem trees—neem trees are what the Indians used the branches to brush their teeth. It was, as I say, first rate. One of the big things, however, in '62 was the border war between India and China.

RV: Do you want to take a break and then we'll get to that?

BZ: All right, very good.

RV: Good enough?

BZ: Yep, yep.

RV: Okay. Barry, tell me about the border war and how it went down and your perspective.

BZ: The border war, the different tensions between China and India cranked up. Remember this was at a time of the height of Chinese communism flexing its muscles later in Indonesia and Vietnam but here it was dancing up with India. India was also very sensitive to any challenges to its sovereignty and integrity and so on. Those border situations tensed up, what was it, in Bhutan and so on. From the viewpoint of the U.S. it came about a most unfortunate time with the heat during the Cuban Missile Crisis. And this is where the worth of having someone close to the president as ambassador, the theoretical role of ambassador and occasionally John Kenneth Galbraith's relations with John F. Kennedy was critical because he was able to communicate, which he did directly with the White House to get through the State Department bureaucracy to urge to the president to do something for the Indians in the face of this pressure from China.

RV: How did State react to that?

BZ: Well, I'm not sure on the record they reacted strongly but they sure as hell didn't like John Kenneth Galbraith running it. Remember Dean Rusk who was a pretty tough bureaucratic fighter in his own right was secretary of state. But at any rate, even though the Cuban Missile Crisis had the priority and the history of that is well known.

John Kenneth Galbraith got the response he wanted and I've never forgotten taking over a group of the correspondents, flying them down in our U.S. Air Force planes which came in to Calcutta, dumped at the airport and waiting there as the huge cargo planes from the U.S. landed and dumped them and out poured all kinds of equipment and personnel and so on. The U.S. had come to the support of India. Very important. Later I flew up with the ambassador to Ladakh, the top of the world so to speak. There was that standoff between the Indian jawan and a Chinese soldier at the border literally each with a rifle at the ready. It finally settled down but it was an important period in testing U.S. support for India, which as I said, as our relations had not been very good prior to that. Soon after that—well, Nehru had died. Soon after that border conflict Galbraith's two years were up. He was on a sabbatical from Harvard University, which was only good for two years. If he didn't go back he would lose his tenure. He went back. Chet Bowles came in on a second assignment as ambassador to India. Chet Bowles had been deputy to Rusk and for whatever reason, some of his public comments and so on; he fell out of favor with the Kennedy administration so they put him out in the field again, out to India. Chet and his wife, Steb, the Indians called her the American ayah, which the Indian word for a sort of nanny, and they were wonderful people. Very different lifestyle from Galbraith and so on.

RV: How so?

BZ: Well, much more low key, most less intense, much more relaxed, old shoe. You never thought of Galbraith as an old shoe thing. He was always in high energy, intellectual activity and so on. Steb Bowles, great woman, almost too much trying to be Indian, wearing a sari and all that thing. She was quite a sight. They were nice people. We had about six months, or I had. Margaret had longer than six months with them. And it was still a happy occasion. During that period the Kennedy assassination took place. A classmate of mine, Jerry Green, was then charge. He was in between ambassadorial assignments and we had a very memorable commemorative event at the American embassy. The president of India, Radhakrishnan, came by and a lot of others. Kennedy, as I say, had been popular. His death was a shock to India. But obviously things were changing in India.

RV: Barry, do you want to talk a little bit more about the Kennedy assassination?

BZ: Well, Bill Weathersby, my boss, happened to be down in southern India on travel. I got the call from the embassy security in the middle of the night that the president had been shot. Obviously we all turned to and did whatever we could do to get the correct information, get it out and so on. There wasn't much sitting in Delhi we could do more than that but the condolences, the sympathy messages from Indians, were extensive, enormous, and as I say, a memorial service was held in Delhi that was very heavily attended and observed. It reflected real Indian concern.

RV: What was your personal reaction?

BZ: Well, what could it be? Not that I was close to the Kennedy's but shocked at something like this happening, particularly if you're in the foreign service overseas where we criticize other countries or at least have serious doubts because of chaos or assassinations and here it happens in our own country. And in comes the new administration, Lyndon B. Johnson. Who knows really what he's like and so on?

RV: What did you think of LBJ up to that point?

BZ: I'm not sure I thought. I certainly had no exposure to him. My only, what shall I say, reflection on LBJ came while I was still at the Voice of America. LBJ was chair of the appropriations sub-committee that handled the Voice's budget among a lot of others, of course. And I remembered very vividly then and still do, Arthur Larson, who I've talked about before, was director of USIA and had been sort of kicked around as a possible vice-presidential nominee for the second term in place of Nixon under Eisenhower. And LBJ who was a tough, tough, some would say ruthless politician chaired a hearing. It was Larson, who obviously hadn't done his homework on the budget or details of USIA operations and was riding high and was a bit of a phony. I don't want to go overboard on that but nevertheless LBJ just took him apart at that hearing on his knowledge about the budget, his knowledge about USIA and cut our budget twenty million bucks, which was big money in those days, just to show who was in command around here. We always said Larson cost the agency twenty million dollars, which was critical money. At any rate we were still in India going along with changes in the U.S. and by February—remember all this took place in November of '63. Things were rough in Vietnam; we'd read about it in the papers, India had pretty good media. February or January I guess, Margaret and I were playing bridge one night with one of

our associates, one of our colleagues and his wife, Barry Reed and his wife, who had been in Moscow when I was there and was now in India with us when Bill Weathersby, my boss, knocked on our door Saturday night with a piece of paper in his hands. And I knew immediately it was a transfer order. I had just made the senior rank in Foreign Service at that time, FSO-1. We were reserves, FSR-1. And so it was inevitable I would be transferred because my position didn't call for one. And Bill came in and said, "Here are your orders. You've been assigned to Vietnam as public affairs officer." In Vietnam the then public affairs officer—the mission in Vietnam under Fred Nolton and John Mecklin was the PAO and former *Fortune* writer who joined the Foreign Service just for this assignment—the mission all fell out. Mecklin was pulled out by USIA. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. had been appointed ambassador just before Ngo Dinh Diem's period. There was a turnover of the entire mission council. The AID director was changed in due course. And this was a quick transfer. We decided Margaret and the boys would stay in New Delhi. The embassy and the mission was very generous in letting them stay in their house. The replacement, when they came in, my replacement would live somewhere else so they stayed there through the end of the school year but in early February, about February tenth or so I took my leave. I had just been elected president of the board of directors of the school, which we had built in New Delhi, the international school, again with rupees. We had to give that up, had to give up all the other programs and relationships.

RV: How did you feel about that, leaving all the stuff that done for three years?

BZ: Well, I hated to leave it but on the other hand this was also a chance to run my own shop and be the public affairs officer in a very critical post and so professionally it was quite an opportunity. Personally if it was dangerous or not, who knows what's going on in Vietnam? The war hadn't cranked up then. There were a lot of—we call it terrorism today—a lot of incidents. I spent a day, took off, left Margaret and the boys, she fended for herself for about six months, four or five months. The boys continued their schooling there but I spent a day or two in Bangkok with the PAO then, a good friend of mine, Jack O'Brien, who had been PAO in Indonesia when I was at the Bandung conference and who later became deputy director of the Voice of America and helped write, in fact he was the basic author of the VOA charter. Well, we had a good

stay. He filled me in on Southeast Asia where I had not served. I had visited it before. And then I arrived in Saigon, February 12, 1964. I remember the time was just about 2:30. Members of the Saigon USIA staff were there, including Charlie Eberhart who was one of the members of the VOA newsroom when I was chief of it. A very fine fellow with his wife, Dave Shepard, my new deputy and various others and then it became four and a half years in Vietnam. One other word about India were the visitors. We had visitors coming out of our ears. India was a favorite visiting spot for congressional delegations to just give them whenever there was a recess in conflict. The young Harvard professor running an AID program at Harvard for international "leaders" named Henry Kissinger would come through every so often looking for candidates for his program.

RV: What did you think of Kissinger?

BZ: Well, he was a Harvard professor running a program. He seemed all right but he wasn't a particular star at that point. He didn't develop into stardom until he started tying up with Nelson Rockefeller and then ultimately joined up with Richard Nixon. But at that time he was a young sort of bright Harvard buddy. He must have even been assistant professor at that point running as what was regarded as a pretty good program. But he was one of many who had come through in that kind of a role. We had cultural types, we had educational types, academic types, and we had judicial types who would come in. That India program was an enormous program. We ran a university program where we would send a team out to one of the Indian universities to talk about the United States concepts, judicial concepts, constitutional concepts and so on. AID started Indian Technical School. The started literally universities based on our old U.S. A&M model, agriculture and mechanical, the land grant universities. But to leave all that behind, as I say, it had been very exciting, and into the storm.

RV: Did you realize you were going into the storm?

BZ: Well, sure. The Vietnam difficulties, it was not a war yet, but the problems in Vietnam were very public and very real. Remember JFK had given that famous speech about Laos and Vietnam and the stakes involved and the need to stop the extension and expansion of the Chinese influence. They had the Magsaysay situation in the Philippines where the rebels had been put down. Indonesia had gone through that almost revolt against Chinese community. China was extending southeast into other

parts of Asia. Thailand was coming under threat. Taiwan, we weren't too far away from difficulties in Taiwan. China was flexing its muscles and Vietnam was at the center of that. Ho Chi Minh, Ho Chi Minh was still alive then. There was a lot of debate about Ho Chi Minh. Was he more communist than nationalist or nationalist than communist? But nevertheless his actions and interests coincided with the Chinese and ultimately with the Russians. So Vietnam was the high spot in the center.

RV: Barry, what did you think of the policy thus far, the stance of the United States?

BZ: Well, remember I'm a Cold War product, anticommunism and instinctively because of my Armenian background I don't particularly like the Russians anyway so I was all very positive about it, about the need to hold back communism. That had been my training, that had been my instinct and the bigger picture of resisting the expansion of communism and the expansion of communism which was regarded as a hostile philosophy and political philosophy was a very real threat then. Remember Eastern Europe had gone under after World War II and the Russians were flexing muscles and expanding in many areas. Cuba was one of them. There were African countries. In the Middle East there was Syria. In Asia they were proving their alliance with the Chinese, although we probably overplayed that alliance. Nevertheless they had communism and the political philosophy that was represented in Vietnam. There were worries about the Chinese communities in Indonesia. They had tried to overthrow the Philippines. Taiwan was under threat. Remember we weren't that far from the Korean War, which again was an extension of communist authority and political ideology.

RV: How much did you think Korea had influenced what was going on with Eisenhower and then Kennedy?

BZ: Well, it's hard to judge because I certainly was obviously not on the inside so the inner conflicts we didn't know. But it did influence it in one regard. All through Vietnam there was a concern that let's not take any moves or steps that will bring China into this war with its huge manpower the way it happened in Korea. So there were effects on our policies in Vietnam out of concern that China would enter the war. I don't think it was ever really thought that Russia would enter the war but Russia would provide assistance and so on, which it did. But China never crossed the border. Well, it did to

some degree in a way, both military and technical consultants and it also did certainly in equipment support but it did not come in with massive troops. But we had the Domino Theory and to some extent the Domino Theory proved right because they did take over Cambodia, the communists. We had concerns about Laos. Thailand was getting various pressures internally and who knows what would have happened if that had gone on unchecked? Would they threaten India in due time? Remember there was a Communist Party in India and there was a guy named Krishna Menon who had been minister of defense. There were a lot working then which we tend today to forget and there are those that make the argument, I grant you it's just a little retrospective, that our efforts in Vietnam really did achieve considerable security because we bought enough time through the ten years we were there for Thailand's government to get its roots down and to fend off the insurgency, for the Philippine government to get its roots down, although Marc was a questionable government, for Indonesia to stabilize and for Taiwan to protect itself and be protected. I'm not sure the history on Vietnam has been fully written yet. The conventional wisdom is it was a great error on our part, we did not win the war, we did not do well. Well, I don't want to claim a ninety degree turn on those things or a hundred and eighty degree turn but I think history in the long run might say it was not quite as black and white as is now the conventional wisdom.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 6 of 11
September 1, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is September 1, 2006. It's a little after 9:00 AM Central Standard Time and Barry, let's pick up with where we were and that is you leaving India and coming into Vietnam. I believe the last time we did talk you gave a brief assessment of the situation in Vietnam. I wonder if you could elaborate on your personal feelings about what was happening there as you came into your office and then what your job was exactly going to be or what you were told your job was going to be.

Barry Zorthian: Well, the introduction probably should be a letter I received from Ed Murrow, the legendary Ed Murrow, which pointed out that there were difficulties within the mission, our mission in Vietnam, and a lot of conflict. My predecessor, John Mecklin, was one time and later after was an editor of *Fortune* magazine and reported for *Fortune* magazine and had taken on the assignment of Saigon as a detour from his journalistic background. At any rate, he had been brought out. As Ed Murrow said, it was not that he had to but that he thought it was for the good. John and I later became very good friends when he visited Saigon in his journalistic capacity a couple of times. But Murrow, in effect, made that change as part of a turnover of almost the entire mission. The new ambassador was in, new relatively, Henry Cabot Lodge. He'd been there only three or four months, new deputy chief of mission, a new aid director came in pretty soon, a new deputy military commander came in named William C. Westmoreland, and so it was a mission change. The old mission had evidently been divided over attitudes towards Diem and how to fight the war. It was heavily criticized by the group of so called young Turks. The correspondents, David Halberstam and Mac Brown, Peter Arnett was there by then, Nick Turner of Reuters, Neil Sheehan of UPI and so on, very controversial. The war, the fighting had not become pervasive. We did have that burning, that monk who burned himself with that famous picture that Mel Brown took, but the situation in Saigon and all of Vietnam was not good. The insurgents, the VC, the Viet Cong, were growing more powerful and more active so it was a difficult situation to walk into.

RV: What did Mr. Murrow say was—did he specify to you what were the problems?

BZ: He did not go into great detail. He did say that the traditional role of a public affairs officer in any mission is supposed to be, among other things, dealing with the media. He did say, "When I proposed your name to the ambassador, Ambassador Lodge, as the replacement for Mecklin, he expressed concern about your lack of French." I had a smattering of French but not fluent. But Murrow said, "I assured them you would overcome that." The other thing he said was, "You are to have nothing to do with the American media there. I have always been my own press officer. I've got a young foreign service officer to assist me so if you can handle the traditional USIA information and cultural work but have nothing to do with the media."

RV: What was your official title, Barry? What was the position?

BZ: Well, when I went in the official title was public affairs officer, head of USIA, the U.S. Information Agency. Now, I got there in February and to finish on that point, one, there's no way the media, the public affairs officers aren't going to deal with the media because the media would come to him. They didn't go to the ambassador with every question in the world. But I'm happy to say that by June when there was a high level meeting in Honolulu chaired by Secretary McNamara and Dean Rusk, Lodge and then Westmoreland, the designated commander of the military command, the MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) in Vietnam, although he hadn't actually taken over. I don't think he took over until July first but he had been announced and appointed and jointly recommended that the whole area relations with the media, both the Vietnamese and foreign, including obviously mostly American, be turned over to one person and that I be that person. That recommendation was made. Carl Rowan who was then director of USIA approved, endorsed that. In due course an NSC (National Security Council) directive signed by the president came out naming me by name, as far as I know the first time it had happened, as the chief public affairs advisor to both the ambassador and to COMUS MACV (Commander United States MACV), Westmoreland's formal title commander and chief of the military assistance command. That was approved and from that point on I was formally, obviously as I say, it was informal in the case before as far as civilian roles, but I was formally in charge of media relations on behalf of the entire

mission. In theory the military public affairs officer obviously reported up his line of command but nevertheless reported to me collaterally, although I must say that varies with whoever the public affairs officer was.

RV: What did you think about this set up? Did you believe that this was viable or did you really not know at point how this was going to go down or how the chain of command and your direction from up top would work?

BZ: We'd later—sure, there were questions about it but I was convinced—people forget that the Vietnam War, and certainly in those years, the first two or three years, was very much a combined civilian/military operation and it was becoming clear that the separate relations between the military and the media just wasn't very good and very effective and that to get some consistency and maximum effect there had to be some kind of a merger of putting together the two. And I think it was better to do it under a civilian umbrella than under a military one, this putting together, because the military's credibility in Vietnam had been tremendously deteriorated because of some of the earlier claims by the military of success like the Vietnamese in the famous book that Neil Sheehan wrote about Ap Bac province and what had happened. So this new approach of the merged effort, combined effort, had sort of paved the way for improvement. Whether it would happen or not depended obviously on the people and Diem but in due course we received, and this cable is among the things you'll have, in addition to the NSC directive of giving me that job and naming me by name—incidentally that was never renewed for any of my successors. But in addition we got a policy guidance, also a presidential directive, which gave authority for making most decisions about information about relations with the media to Saigon and it said specifically, "It is anticipated that most decisions on release of information, on handling the media, will be made in Saigon," not in Washington as had become the practice. Now that, too, made a lot of sense and it sort of cut down the gap between the reality on the ground and what was being announced in Washington. How closely that was observed in due time again is a matter of some debate.

RV: Did they tell you how closely to observe that going into this?

BZ: Oh yeah, and the essential guidance on information, on the information approach, the phrase that's come is "maximum candor, minimum security" and that's the principle I tried to follow and observe.

RV: What does that mean exactly, to you, Barry?

BZ: Well, it means honesty in provision of information. It means that overcoming the charges that had been made in the prior year or two years of the military distorting information, basically of lying. It means to be perfectly honest about setbacks and the actual situation and so on. A lot of that misinformation or holding back of information was justified on grounds of security so when it said minimum security it also meant apply security only when it was truly valid and not as a cover-up mechanism. Now, that whole approach, again over time and particularly after Tet things deteriorated somewhat and Washington kept getting back into the picture. One of our continuing problems in dealing with the media in Washington, particularly the big name journalists would very often be briefed in Washington by as senior people as Walt Rostow, who became national security advisor to President Johnson after McGeorge Bundy left the job. And every so often would come out to us and we'd brief them in Saigon or they'd talk to other sources in Saigon and then they'd end up saying, "This is a different war than what we've been told in Washington." There was a gap there, a growing gap later and into the sixties. But initially at least in Saigon we released all kinds of information, made the principles in the mission available to the media. I gave briefing after briefing after briefing, we had a daily—on the way back from that Honolulu meeting I sat next to Frank McCulloch of *Time* magazine, who was one of the great reporters of Vietnam incidentally, and said, "Frank, I got this new assignment, this new responsibility. How the hell do I do it? How do I handle all these people, the press corps?" Saigon was growing, the young Turks were still there but others were coming in and both visitors and residents. Frank said, "Well, one thing you can do is have a time certain each day like the White House press conference, the State Department press conference where you're available in your office to answer any questions the media has." I picked up on that suggestion and announced shortly thereafter after getting to Saigon that I would be in my office every day and we figured out the best time in terms of filing back to the States and so on, at five o'clock in the afternoon. Initially I was alone but I made the point by then

of having read all the cables, seen the reports, and being as knowledgeable as possible about what was going on. I said, "You can get me at other times of the day but I'll be in and out and doing my other responsibilities but at five o'clock you can show up at my office and ask whatever questions you have." Now initially I was alone. Subsequently I talked to MACV, Westmoreland's PAO then, a lieutenant colonel named Breaux, to come down. MACV used to handle press relations by just putting out a mimeograph sheet, a photocopied sheet of the daily announcements. "Here's today's figures and statistics. So many incidents, so many reported casualties," and they would just put it in mailboxes at MACV headquarters for the press, the media mailbox, and that's it. They did not have anyone there to answer questions.

RV: And they could take that information and interpret it however they wanted to without hearing from you guys?

BZ: Well, we talked to them and worked with them and got the MACV PAO to come down and join me at five o'clock with his press release in hand. And so for a while, five o'clock first day there were half a dozen reporters there, the next day maybe two, the next day eight. It started growing and it became an established pattern. At five o'clock every day I'd sit on one end of the couch in my office, the military officer, lieutenant colonel, later a full colonel, ultimately a brigadier general would sit there and answer questions from the press, both on the civilian side of the house, civilian activities, and military. Finally that got so big and so many reporters that we moved it to another room, a conference room on the same floor. It grew from there to where we moved it downstairs on the ground floor to the [USIA] library had been. The library had been sacked in one of those demonstration periods. We moved the library up to the residence I had. That had been held for the PAO, which was much too big for me at that time and used the library space, converted it into a briefing room for the media with our press officers in offices around it. And that was the site of what became known ultimately as the Five o'clock Follies. Now also that task of dealing with the media reached such a level that I couldn't do that every day and do the rest of my job as well so Washington gave me a very senior deputy from media relations. MACV raised the military rank of their PAO to full colonel, as I say ultimately general, and the daily briefing was handled by them. To replace my presence at those meetings and make myself available, I every

Wednesday at two o'clock in the afternoon would again be in my office and the small sort of full-time inter-group correspondents would gather there and I'd go over the whole week's activities with them in a weekly report and so on.

RV: How soon did this happen, Barry? What's the time frame here?

BZ: For what, the Wednesday meetings?

RV: Yes sir, when you shifted from the large gathering to the small gathering of the inner circle.

BZ: I personally shifted. The large gathering continued with my deputies, Harold Kaplan, Jack Stewart, et cetera. That must have been by '65. Early '65, spring of '65 I probably had made the shift. The other interaction with correspondents, I would have two other areas, a lot of daily one on ones with people, particularly visiting correspondents. But Thursday evenings I would have background briefings in my residence with a guest briefer, a General Westmoreland, a head of [AID], a specialist in counterinsurgency programs, the embassy political officer, Phil Habib, at times. It was a pleasant setting, drinks, nothing much to eat but some knick-knacks but it was very relaxed, very informal. The journalists were limited to one per outfit. AP had a pretty large bureau there and *New York Times* had a bureau so it was a limited number who came and it was sort of by invitation but that was a continuing feature of our media relations.

RV: When did you start doing that?

BZ: Oh, I started that pretty early in the game. Again, certainly by the end of '64 and into '65.

RV: Why did you do it, Barry?

BZ: In order to be able to provide maximum candor you can't—you have an ally out there who has certain weaknesses. They probably thought we had weakness, too, but you can't be absolutely candid, in particular the military side, about your ally and be honest and not criticize them and obviously criticizing them or evaluating them publicly by name as a source would lead to difficulties. So this permitted a General Westmoreland or the political counselor speaking for the ambassador the opportunity to do some honest talking and frank appraisal. We also used that platform off the record. I remember [Gen.] Wally Green the commandant of the Marine Corps visiting Saigon and

some others from Washington; Henry Kissinger at one point for that kind of a background briefing. Still another way I dealt with the media is I would go out to the provinces. MACV provided air transportation, the chopper or a fixed wing going out to where the province was and invite a correspondent, particularly a visiting correspondent, to come with me. That was useful and giving them again, exposure to the factions underground was real world. Then still another approach was briefings by the ambassador. Every so often, not on a regular basis but every so often, first Lodge but more actively Maxwell Taylor when he became ambassador would have a background briefing and answer questions. Some of them would be on the record and some would not. Finally we set up, obviously with MACV's cooperation, access to aircraft, and particularly when aircraft support was sufficient, provision of enough aircraft to take correspondents out to the field.

RV: When did this happen, Barry?

BZ: Well, again, this evolved through late '64 and through the year of '65. MACV set up an accreditation system and MACV accreditation was sufficient to get access to military aircraft flying in Vietnam if the pilot had room. And as I say, we used to have sort of press flights up to Da Nang, up to the north and these were heavily used. But correspondents were able to get out to the field to see the actual situation.

RV: What was the accreditation process like? What did they have to go through?

BZ: The accreditation process?

RV: The MACV accreditation system.

BZ: Well, they had to be obviously identified and certified, if that's the right word, by a legitimate media bureau organization. In the United States, the obvious ones were the networks, the Associated Press, the UPI, the *Times*, *Post*, the *LA Times*, and that thing. They had to bring some evidence of accreditation. Visiting correspondents, and there was a constant flow of journalists coming in, some of it incidentally underwritten in '65 by the Pentagon. There was a series in the Pentagon that some of the old time journalists, the old World War II veteran journalists ought to be getting Vietnam to balance out the young Turks, the young Halberstans and Mel Browns and Neil Sheehans and Peter Arnetts who were much more favorably disposed towards the U.S. military

than these young ones so the Pentagon set up underwriting trips out and some very well-known journalists came out under that sponsorship.

RV: What did you think of that, Barry?

BZ: Well, it was questionable because obviously they were brought out to balance this off at the U.S. government's expense and there were journalists who criticized that as sort of a forced-fed in an effort to get favorable coverage. Now the coverage that came out didn't always turn out that favorable because some of it was critical. But there also was a certain amount of, if you will, more mature correspondents or more experienced correspondents coming up with much more positive coverage so in that sense it was effective, or at least in part. I'm not sure it was the best practice in the world. The coverage they provided on a sponsored trip was always open. Credibility issues were always raised. Peter Lisagor, famous Chicago news correspondent, Maggie Higgins of the *Herald Tribune* who made her fame during Korea, a lot of them came out. Jack Reynolds of the *New York Times* came out on those sponsored trips.

RV: If we could go back, let me ask you about one thing that you mentioned earlier about ways to get the information out to the public. There's one overriding principle here that I think people listening to this might be very surprised at and that is that the United States government wanted to actually be honest with the press and with the public about what was really happening on the ground. I know this is pre-'68 and things really changed attitude-wise afterward and people listening to this will probably know that but initially in this '64, '65, '66 period was that really what was happening? There was a real honest effort by the government, not by yourself, but by the government to get this information out?

BZ: Well, you put your finger on the problem. I will say flat—the conventional wisdom of Vietnam today, the old-timers kept talking about the generals were lying to us. In Saigon we had to get out to the field to find out the truth. I say flatly in my four years of that intense media experience, I never put out information that I knowingly felt was untrue, that was distorted. I obviously put out our interpretation of events based on the information we received. The information we received may have been flawed, if not totally wrong, and our interpretation may have been questionable but that is a far cry from lying, distortion, dissembling, but even there I would suggest that the information

from the field, if ever, was not distorted. It is absolutely normal in the military to interpret events, battlefield actions in a positive way. You don't very often get a front line commander starting with platoon leaders who says, "We got clobbered today." They report their casualties. Now a reporter being on the front lines may interpret the results of that battle very negatively, particularly if he's not very experienced as a war correspondent so we would have situations where the information, particularly on military issues provided in Saigon would be questioned by journalists returning from the battlefield. We would have situations where our judgment and interpretation of events on the civilian side, particularly in regard to the Vietnamese government, would be questioned by reporters who had talked to opposition people in Vietnam or critics of the government, and that would lead to these charges of false information. We also would have situations where in Washington there was a pattern of looking at the more positive aspects of reports coming in and emphasizing those to the point where they seemed a hundred and eighty degrees different from the thrust of the original report being handed out in Saigon. So that, too, led to what all became known as the credibility gap, although the term "the credibility gap" originated in '63, long before my period in Vietnam. Now, other ways and other problems of dealing with the press, one was censorship. I had at least two occasions because critical coverage of the war continued, there was pressure to—you said, "Did you ever want the truth to get out?" And so on—there was efforts to impose censorship in Vietnam. This was considered once within the mission itself and two by a military team that came out from Washington. I resisted on both occasions for two reasons mainly. One, it wasn't the right thing to do. The American public has accepted wartime censorship on a very limited basis historically, only justified for the protection of tactical military information. Information that if released would jeopardize the lives of combat personnel. It has never accepted censorship, even during World War II, even during Korea when forms of censorship were imposed. It has never accepted censorship on discussion of the strategies, the political side; the thrust for justification for the war and so on. Most of the criticism of the Vietnam War was of that latter kind. Why are we there in the midst of a civil war and so on? This was the type of coverage, which was very annoying to the military and civilian side, to LBJ and so on. But this was the type of coverage that could not be censored, that had never been censored before and

in practical terms couldn't be censored. You could write in the States about that kind of coverage. Furthermore, the second major reason was that to have effective censorship you need certain things. One, the sovereign government in Vietnam was not a military theater of war. We were in an assistance role, a supporting role in theory. The sovereign government was the South Vietnamese government and part of the South Vietnamese government applying; executing the heavy demands of censorship for three hundred Western correspondents was just too dangerous (laughs) and too frightening a thought. They simply weren't equipped for it. Furthermore, to have censorship you need to control the physical being, the journalist physically. You need to control his logistics; you need to control his communications. We didn't have any of that in Vietnam and in no way were we going to be able to apply it. We had journalists in Vietnam, I can think of some French particularly, who never were accredited to MACV, who simply came to Vietnam with a Vietnamese visa, covered the war from Saigon or took a commercial flight up to Da Nang and covered the war up there and so on. We never controlled—we never controlled the communication. AP had its own feed to the States, television would deal with the footage and send it out to Tokyo or to California or Los Angeles for processing and so on and we never controlled the logistics, the travel. Correspondents lived on their own, they had their own residences; they had their own places where they ate. When they went out in the field they could go out by private car if they wanted to. Some did lease a car. They could travel by commercial air up to the place like Da Nang and get in another vehicle up there and go out to the military units and so on. So in practical terms we couldn't impose censorship and I'm happy to say—not happy but pleased that the efforts to impose censorship were turned down on both occasions. We did work out with the media ground rules of what information they would not run based on the principles of past self-denial by the media: tactical military information, when an operation would go forward, what units were in there, what the casualties were and so on and the media were very careful in that regard. In the four years I was there we only had three or four or five, not more than a half dozen violations of those ground rules and most of those were inadvertent. I only had one real challenge. I think I mentioned this Jack Foisie of the *Los Angeles Times*, who happened to be the brother in law of Dean Rusk, he challenged it by running a story on an operation, and the punishment was we lifted his

credentials for a month. He couldn't use MACV transportation, et cetera, et cetera, and as a result he later admitted to me he had wanted to test the rules but thought in a way it was wrong in the way he did it. Now, the final thing we did for the media, we opened a subsidiary press center up in Da Nang, largely run by the Marines who had the IV Corps and so Marine PAO up there, Dick Stark and so on, ran that press center. Tom Fields was up there. But we put a lot of effort and time into, if you will, serving the media, and I think that as long as things were the military situation, the stability in Vietnam seemed to be improving. The results on these efforts for media relations were fine. We got better, if you will more positive coverage. Now, when things began deteriorating in Vietnam and finally in Tet a lot of that fell apart, although there was a critical element all the way through. It didn't really collapse until Tet. Okay.

RV: Yes, Barry, we're out of time for today.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 7 of 11
September 20, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is September 20, 2006. It's about 9:15 AM Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock and Barry is again in Washington. Barry, let's continue. I wanted to ask you about the Da Nang press center and a description of that but also an overall question of when information needed to be dispersed throughout the country to the public, to the press I guess, how was that done? Was that done really through you in Saigon or did you have people working through you in Saigon or did you have people working for you out in other areas that you could contact and say, "Do this, say this now?"

Barry Zorthian: Well, there were only two formal press centers. One was the one in Saigon, which obviously was the primary one. Then there was a press center in Da Nang. The Da Nang press center was principally a Marine Corps press center. Marines had the top part of the country, I Corps, with the head in Da Nang and the head pressman in Da Nang was, well, as far as I can remember always a Marine, certainly during my period. Now it became a bit more than that when the air strikes started in '65 I guess, out of the Da Nang airbase. Among others there were carrier strikes and so on and people were sensitive to covering the sounds of the takeoffs of planes for bombing strikes to the North. As a matter of fact, an interesting thing, on cooperation by the media on tactical security information, when planes would take off to head north and their engines sounds and so on were heard by correspondents, they in turn would file stories to the U.S. on their lines, which were not secure lines, saying, "X flights took off for Hanoi or took off for the North today for a bombing strike." The North Vietnamese had ships offshore saying—and the rumor was they were Russian ships but nevertheless obviously supporting North Vietnam—monitoring those signals and our intelligence people said what they would do then is alert Hanoi, "Planes are on the way," and our air defenses would be up and so on. So we raised this with the journalists, and this is an example as I say of their readiness to cooperate, and they agreed that they would not write about air strikes, the timing of them, or even the existence of them until the planes returned to their

airbase when they would get an all clear, "Go ahead and run the story." This was done on a volunteer basis and observed, at least the time I was there, without violation. It was typical of the ground rules more than out of Saigon, protecting tactical military information, which as I said earlier, was the only type of censorship of information, the least of which would jeopardize the lives of troops or the success of operations that was protected. The air strike thing, the waiting until the planes returned was another example, and it was acceptable, if you want to call it censorship, or self-restraint. Now, how'd we get news out across the country? There were, as I said, just those two press centers. Every day, and this became known, the infamously named Five o'clock Follies, we'd have a press briefing in Saigon at JUSPAO, Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office headquarters where both the civilian and military would brief the press corps and attendance at those things was pretty substantial.

RV: Right. You said they grew substantially really from the initial meetings to where you had to get into a large room.

BZ: Well as I say, on the ground floor of the building—what was it called? It's the one in which there is now a restaurant on top. At any rate, our library was there. Our library was sacked during one of those early uprisings so we moved the library to the house, to the public affairs officer's house, my house, which was much too big for me to live in alone. I moved to other quarters and we made the space the library had been in, redid it as an auditorium for press briefings and for the few offices we had for the press operations. Now a lot of the divisions out in the field or units out in the field, a number of them had their own press officers but their job mainly was when correspondents came out to cover their division and more specifically to cover any operations or to go on operations as they came, that's what the local press officer would handle. He would not try to provide any briefings. If you went out to the field you got a briefing perhaps or at least access to information about that particular unit on which later in the Iraq War came to be called embedding, but you certainly did not brief on the whole Vietnam picture. That picture was provided only in Saigon and for the north in Da Nang.

RV: Okay. Can I ask you about a couple of major events? The Gulf of Tonkin incident. Tell me your impression of kind of where you were at the time and looking back in retrospect now your opinion of it.

BZ: Well, the Gulf of Tonkin events—remember we were not on land. That was out at sea. It was not in the MACV, the Vietnamese command's territory. The reports we heard about obviously. We got the same information through the military channels, probably fairly detailed information, and those were used as you know by President Johnson in the conviction I'm sure that they did take place although there have been a lot of questions raised since then for that resolution that passed through Congress that in the president's eyes authorized the use of American military combat power in Vietnam. Looking back at it the conventional wisdom is that the attacks never did take place. I guess there's some question left about that. Bill Bundy wrote a book on it which was never published I think. He did a lot of inquiry later and there are a lot of question marks but they certainly did not take place to the extent believed then and probably to any extent at all that was major. There may have been some shots fired and so on but even those are questionable.

RV: Right. But the deed was done.

BZ: The deed was done and the justification for the entrance of American forces was made.

RV: Yeah. Operation Pierce Arrow followed that and did you see a change in attitude when that happened, when then retaliatory air strikes happened? This is obviously before the Marines landed at Da Nang but from the time we started the air strikes to the time we landed in Da Nang, what was the attitude that you witnessed and the attitude you saw around the Americans that you were with?

BZ: Well, I wrote a piece on this incidentally which you will find in the papers which I sent down on the start of the fighting and this was on the twenty-fifth anniversary of it. The eagle's tail, as I said, had been tweaked repeatedly. There was the attack at the airbase at Binh Hoa while Mac Bundy was in Vietnam. There was that attack on Pleiku, there was the attack on the Brinks Hotel in Saigon and obviously both the official mission, the senior mission, but also throughout the advisory groups there and various other people stationed there—there was both concern and a hell of a lot of anger. "When are we doing to get back at these people?" Remember militarily things were going bad. We were losing almost a battalion of Vietnamese troops a week. There was all kinds of talk about the VC cutting across the peninsula and cutting off the southern part of

Vietnam from the north. There was well confirmed reports of not just the VC but regular North Vietnamese Army troops infiltrating into the South and the NVA, North Vietnamese Army was bringing in organized units. A lot of observers denied that but the intelligence that MACV had was pretty persuasive on that and certainly was confirmed subsequently. Westmoreland was facing problems and this is one of the points I make in that piece I wrote on Westmoreland. He wasn't raising the bidding. The North Vietnamese were raising the bidding. Inevitably we felt, a lot of us, that American forces were going to go in. There was a great deal of opposition to that. I remember Max Taylor, when he came back and I'm quite sure this is precise enough, between Thanksgiving and Christmas he came back for one week for consultations in Washington and he told the mission council meeting, he said, "I'm going back to recommend to the president that at the right opportunity, the next time one of these attacks takes place, U.S. troops be authorized to command combat troops." He said, "I'd like to be able to say the mission council agrees unanimously with this recommendation, even if you don't. Be aware that as ambassador and the president's representative here I will make such a recommendation on my own responsibility." The mission council did approve that. That was the mission council at that time, most of whom were putting veterans out there and the turnover was starting. He came back and had indicated that that authorization had been given before that decision had been made. Then on Christmas just before the Christmas holiday there was the attack on—well, it was the one on Brinks, I guess. Being Christmas we didn't feel we ought to go into combat then. Then in January near Tet another attack took place and Tet being the big holiday in Asia also a time presumably for peace, again the decision was put to put in off. But then in February as I say, while Mac Bundy was in Saigon for consultations—Kosygin incidentally at that time was in Hanoi—Pleiku took place. Recommendation and authorization for the air strikes was sought. While that was being decided in Washington Bundy and Westmoreland went up to Pleiku for an on-the-scene inspection examination, came back late that afternoon. I'm almost sure it was a Sunday. Word came in from Washington, "Go ahead," and the first airplanes took off. We had an awkwardly worded press release, which Alec Johnson who was deputy ambassador drafted. I edited a little bit but didn't change the essence of it. I had that press release, told the press to be in my office at five

o'clock, handed out that release saying American planes took off today for the first air strikes. First acknowledged air strikes in the North, the U.S. has entered this war. It was the first time in my life not a single question was asked. Correspondents grabbed the release and ran with it and that was the start of the American entrance in the war. Then in March the Marines landed up at—

RV: At Da Nang.

BZ: China Beach, that area. That was the start of American combat presence. We had about—my figures may be off but they're close enough—twenty to twenty-five thousand advisors, logistic personnel and so on, in country at that time. When I left—that was '65. In July of '68 we had something like five hundred and sixty thousand Americans.

RV: Obviously you all did not see that coming did you?

BZ: In June—these events took place in February and March. In June, while incidentally I was on a long-delayed home leave which got cut short, Max Taylor called me right back, a conference was held in Honolulu of the military. Max Taylor was there. They announced the authorization for an increase of American combat forces in Vietnam and I've never forgotten a statement by Taylor, a public statement, "We may need as many a hundred and fifty thousand troops there." As I say, the figure ended up in the five hundred and sixty thousand. And one of the reasons for it—now, there's a lot of argument about that, a lot of second guessing and Westmoreland demanding more, more, more, Johnny Apple wrote that piece about Westy wanting more, more, more. I keep saying the reason Westmoreland did it, his tactics, his strategy had been questioned, search and destroy tactics and so on was because the North Vietnamese kept raising the bar, sending another North Vietnamese regiment or unit or whatever and Westy had to provide the defense against it and it was just a bad poker game of raising each other. The old military rule of thumb, I don't know what they'd call it today, but defense is needed a ten to one ratio over offensive, made it critical that an awful lot more troops come in and the Vietnamese weren't ready to take it on. Look at what's happening in Iraq today. Abrams's Vietnamization after he took over from Westy, fine, I have nothing against Abrams's, but that concept of the Vietnamese developing enough capability to provide the defense of South Vietnam was in the making over a period of time and everyone

knew that was the final solution. The only issue was how long would it take and how effective would the Vietnamese be? The Vietnamese finally collapsed. I've always noted that in contrast to what was closest then, the Chinese revolution of the forties, late forties, where whole divisions surrendered or disbanded, Chiang Kai-shek's units, and along the Vietnam War until the end, not a single Vietnamese unit surrendered or gave up as a unit. Now there were a lot of desertions individually. There were desertions on both sides, incidentally, but no Vietnamese unit, for all the criticism of their military capabilities, no Vietnamese unit as a unit under the command of their commanders surrendered to the North.

RV: Barry, did you think that Vietnamization had a chance?

BZ: Sure, but it had to be done by the right people. Initially the South Vietnamese government so called had been heavily—I almost used the word infiltrated—assaulted with the Northerners who came down at the time of the Geneva Agreements, about a million and half North Vietnamese came south, heavily Catholic. Diem was a Catholic. His brother was archbishop of Hanoi. The North Vietnamese got into positions of power in the South and worked with South Vietnamese city boys. They'd go out to the hamlets with city clothes on city shoes and no way to communicate. The VC were very effective in infiltrating through both common bonds, common outlets, wearing peasant clothes, the black pajama type and so on as well as atrocities, assassination and torture of any opposition. The South Vietnamese did not do that. Furthermore the South Vietnamese did not have a standing military. Their leadership was quite weak. Some of the generals were corrupt. It was a very, very questionable outfit. Gradually some decent officers emerged. Little by little they took over. Insofar as hamlet penetration went they started that Ruff Puff (RFPF Regional Forces/Popular Forces) program, the rural—what were they called, education teams—that tried to be as close to the hamlet's rural population as the VC had been and with some success. Then that got into the Phoenix operation of assassination of VC and so-on leadership that lead to all these charges that nevertheless was an answer to the terrorism being practiced by the VC.

RV: Did you think the Phoenix program was viable, was okay to go forward?

BZ: Well, given the rules of the game in Vietnam of what the VC were doing; it probably was the only realistic reaction we could undertake. The game was being played

very rough out there. Now, the Phoenix program was aimed at military personnel who were also political personnel and were not in formal Vietnamese uniforms but certainly were, if you will, combatants in the full sense of the word. Most of it incidentally really developed to a great extent after I left. Bill Colby came out there, although he had been the Vietnam guy at CIA back there in Washington. He came out on assignment and was stationed in Saigon a little bit before I left, almost at the same time, and he's the one that developed that program.

RV: Well, let's go back, if you don't mind, to 1965 after the Marines land and we start sending more ground troops over and through the spring and into the summer into the fall of 1965. Tell me about how your job changed in Saigon. What happened there?

BZ: Well, they used to call me the information czar. Gradually that authority got diluted as the military grew in size. They very naturally wanted to control or direct the media program on their own terms and while it never came to any confrontation the military, Col. Roger Banks came out as chief PAO, a very good guy and got along well. Eventually side assignments came out. He was replaced as a general, a brigadier general. He was replaced by another general and eventually he went on to take on the artillery and became a major general. But the military as I said, as they grew, particularly when they got above three hundred, four hundred, five hundred thousand people, said, "Hey, we'll run our media efforts," and my job more and more became advisor to the ambassador in handling the civilian side of the media operations, although I still had a voice. Because of our standing relationship I'd still call Westy and say, "Here's what we ought to do. Let's do this," and they'd more or less be responsive. You occasionally got a military press officer who said, "Can't let those goddamn civilians tell us what to do." But there was not too much of that. However, Washington was getting tired of me. My own agency thought I'd been there too long. The president told someone, and this was quoted later, that I'd probably been in there too long.

RV: This is 1968, though, right?

BZ: Right, and when I left the job was split up. Clearly media relations were handled. My successor was a State Department career officer, George Friedman who was on the organization charts as a special assistant to the ambassador. Eventually JUSPAO was disbanded. The head of JUSPAO became a public affairs officer, director

of USIS again. The military went off on it's own with the general in charge of PR (public relations). This evolution took place over a couple of years, I think. There was increasing criticism in the military of my approach to media relations. A lot of them figured I was giving away the ballgame. It was too open a war. I had resisted censorship, I was putting out too much information, the media was uncontrolled and hog wild and that's what led to one of the, at least, second efforts to impose censorship.

RV: Barry, did you feel that they were kind of putting this on your shoulders?

BZ: Oh yeah, to a certain extent. Bob Ellegant wrote a column about that once, about the military's objection to my role there and eventually all that caught up. You get in a job like that, you chew up your credit over time and eventually you're a burden, not an asset. So my own agency moved me out of being director of what was USIS. My backing in all of this all through Vietnam was always the ambassador, even Henry Cabot Lodge who didn't like not me personally, didn't like a public affairs officer of any standing. He wanted a press assistant but Max Taylor backed me all the way and Ellsworth Bunker was particularly supportive and at the end, and this is why I keep looking for that cable. Bunker and Westmoreland recommended I be appointed—what was the title—head of IV Corps, which was a lieutenant general, billet. The other three corps had general and the IV Corps they thought should have a civilian because it was the most pacified of the areas and recommended me to Washington. I effectively turned that down. I'd been there four and a half years, my wife had had to do a lot of raising the children all alone, and my sons were growing up. They said, "Dad, you've got to come home. Mom can't take it that long." So I have it up, that assignment, and left in July of '68.

RV: How much did you miss it?

BZ: Miss what?

RV: Miss Vietnam and miss that job.

BZ: Oh, tremendously. Professionally it was the top, the ultimate in the career I'd been following. You're at the center of action, the world's important events and activities and you're right in the middle of it feeling you're playing a reasonably important role in it. Sure you miss it. The replacement assignments for it, while they

were all regarded in my agency, the USIA, as major assignments they all seemed very, very minimally attractive.

RV: Would you consider that the high point of your career?

BZ: Yes, but I hasten to say, and this is self-justification I think, while in conventional terms it's the high point in my career, it's the most visible, I think I had other achievements in my life. In many ways, what happened at the Voice of America was, and until recently, more lasting than what happened in Vietnam and I think I even made some very critical contributions at Time, Inc. in leading the company's entrance into the cable field where it is now, as you know, the second largest cable company. I was very active in establishing and was the first chairman of Home Box Office. So there are other things I have done of which I am proud but as I say, the visibility of the Vietnam experience was I guess the most prominent. You know, I claim we embedded—God bless that word. It's the demonstration of the power of words, embedding. Embedding was practiced in Vietnam long before and acknowledged by people. The press was free to go out and join any unit subject only to that unit's commanding officer's decision. He might say, "I don't want the media," and that was within his rights. Not many took that position. I'm not sure there were any so the press, the individual correspondents, would go out in the field and bunk in for a couple of days or a week or whatever with combat units, both men and women incidentally. Now, a lot of the visiting press, the one week wonders or the three day wonders would come into Saigon and just get briefed by a few contacts within the mission and by other members of the press. There was a hurried sense there which wasn't always helpful. We had the daily press briefings of course but we had innumerable open access so anyone could talk to the press. This, I claim, was the most open of wars and that recent AP conference, I guess, symposium, in which the individual correspondents, George Esper, and others, Peter Arnett and others, said there will never be another Vietnam War openness. It certainly didn't happen in the first Gulf War and it's not happening in this war.

RV: Is that a mistake?

BZ: It's determined by physical situations. In the first Gulf War the Saudis had complete control of the country and gave out visas to come and go and then access to the military units was a matter of control of the military. They would take out a company

press party and so on. Yes, I think it's a mistake. I think in today's world of complete, if you will, excessive communication there's no way you can block off access. One way or the other the media are going to get in. In the first Gulf War there supposedly was great control but luckily for the military the actual ground combat lasted only about three or four days. By then the media were already getting out on their own and running, if you will, the formal controls. I don't think, and I've said this before, we could have imposed censorship in Vietnam if we had wanted to. Now, the flip side of this is that in this kind of an open war, everyone talks and the media, and I say this in criticism, would give as much weight to a private on a front line platoon's comments about the whole war, not about what he knew about. As they went to a statement by the commanding officer of that unit or the commanding general or the ambassador, everyone was free and in a situation as complex and as large as that you're going to find all kinds of opinions so there was a temptation for the media to which they were subject in many cases of finding reinforcements of their initial outlook and if you will, bias. I've written a piece for the *New York Times*, which you'll find somewhere in those papers saying this was the most open of wars and as I say there are those who say there will never be another one this open. But embedding was real, briefings were real. I'd have Wednesday briefings by myself even when I wasn't doing the daily briefings in my office, background briefings going over the week's developments and reports and so on. Thursdays I'd have briefings at my residence of either a senior mission council representative or a visiting. I had briefings there by certainly Westmoreland; by Phil Habib, the political counselor, by the head of AID; by George Tannem, the specialist on counterinsurgency; by such people as General Green of the Marine Corps; Henry Kissinger, who was then on a special assignment out there from the White House looking into the Chieu Hoi program and the possibility of communication. So there were all kinds of ways of briefing. Furthermore, if the ambassador was going out on a visit to the provinces—and all the ambassadors did that periodically—looking at some program or another, I'd usually invite one or two correspondents to go on the same plane. When I went out weekends I would invite some correspondent to come with me if there was any interest. As a matter of fact I'm reminded of that by the death the other day of Oriana Fallaci who came to Vietnam. I had a memorable lunch with her alone in my residence which she includes in her book,

Nothing and What of It, and I also took her out to the field with me, as I did many others, particularly visiting correspondents so they'd get out of the Saigon setup. But that's one area. The charge was against me that I was too open, that I was giving away the ballgame, that I was making too much information available. I would say this was, for my defense if you will, the application of my instructions, maximum candor with minimum security. Okay, move on.

RV: Okay. Let me ask you about those charges or those accusations that you did give away too much. Obviously you don't feel like you did. Why were they saying this? What gave them cause to say these things?

BZ: Because so much of the coverage was critical of the military and in certain instances unjustified criticism but in other instances, yes, valid criticism. The military gets very defensive and I can understand that. I guess if I were in uniform and being heavily criticized by the *New York Times* and so on I'd feel defensive, too, up to and including the president.

RV: Meaning?

BZ: LBJ.

RV: He criticized you?

BZ: No, he criticized the coverage by the media.

RV: Right. Does that inevitably lead back to you?

BZ: Well, ultimately yes, although the president never criticized me directly except to say, "Why can't you control the media? Why can't you handle them better?" And then ultimately reportedly saying I'd been there too long. But I've never forgotten a meeting I sat in with Leonard Marks, Frank Stanton, then president of CBS, and the president in a little room off the Oval Office where the president just chewed out Frank Stanton for the coverage by Morley Safer or so on, saying, "I know this Morley Safer. He's a Canadian, he's got ties to communists and so on and if you can't control him, Frank, I will." That kind of thing. Arthur Sylvester, very critical of media coverage and Sylvester was a journalist before his appointment.

RV: What did Frank say to LBJ or did he just sit and listen?

BZ: Nothing. And I later asked Walter Cronkite about this. I said, "Did Frank Stanton ever approach you or that newsroom and fill you in on these charges by the

president or ask you to tone it down and so on?" He said, "No, he never, never did." Frank just took it. He knew the president better than I did. It was just Johnson getting rid of his frustrations.

RV: Could you talk to LBJ? No you personally but in general if someone is in a meeting you're sitting in could one speak up and come back at him?

BZ: Rob Donavan in his book on LBJ and Truman reports on a story I told Bob. I was back here on consultations, sitting in the Roosevelt Room. Bill Moyers was then the press officer at the White House and we were having a meeting talking about what to do in Vietnam and so on. Someone came in and said, "The president wants to see you and Zorthian. He's upstairs." So the two of us got up. We went up to the family quarters into the bedroom where the president, as was his custom, was taking a post-lunch nap or getting ready for it. We walk in the room, the president starts talking holding forth against the criticism by the media in Vietnam why we can't control them. Without a chance for certainly me or even Bill getting a word in beyond, "Yes sir, yes, Mr. President." In the middle of these kinds of diatribe, he lifts the covers of the bed and he had only his top on, no bottoms. He walks open to the bathroom, the door is open, relieves himself. He's a big man. It sounds like a horse. (Laughs) He hasn't stopped a bit, finishes his work, comes back, gets into bed, finishes his statement, Bill and I say, "Yes, sir," and walk out. When you say could you talk back to the president, it was hard at our level to talk back to LBJ.

RV: Did you even want to?

BZ: No. What are you going to say to him? One, I can't control the press and he knows it as well as I do. Two, the press may be right in a lot of these things and three, if you tried to control him you'd get more criticism and there were unfair stories. Peter Arnett wrote a couple. I never forgot one he wrote, a nasty story about Westmoreland playing tennis at Cercle Sportif in Saigon in whites and one of these while the wars are going on and soldiers are in combat up to their neck and are passing things off their commander is playing tennis. Westmoreland was probably the hardest working man out there and every so often needed a break. But so be it.

RV: Tell me what you thought about William Westmoreland.

BZ: He was a very decent guy right out of the book. Ernest Ferguson wrote a book, *The Inevitable General*. I became very good friends later with one of Westmoreland's West Point classmates, Ted Clifton, Major General Clifton, who tells the story of when they first got to the first day of going into West Point and people were arriving on whatever they did, train or bus and such, and walking up towards the barracks and so on and Westy saying to Ted who he had just met, "You see that place up there, those cadets? I'm going to be first captain." And he was first captain. He was a standard. He was not very articulate in a conventional sense. He wasn't smooth. He was by the field manual. As I say, a very decent guy, very self conscious, self-important, but I think much of the lines—I said in that piece I wrote he was probably the most micromanaged major field general in history. Everyone was on his back. Do this, do that, starting with Max Taylor who pinned I think three of his four stars on him, up to and including the president. Everyone was after him. "Do this, do that. You're doing it wrong, you're doing it right," and it was a very, very difficult situation. Was the strategy always right? Well, I can say that I'm not enough of a military specialist to make that judgment. I do know that Ho Chi Minh and General Giap kept raising the ante in Vietnam, kept sending down more and more and more and more organized units. Westy had to match it to save, if you will, preserve the South Vietnamese territory. Was search and destroy right? Well initially probably. Should he have adjusted quicker to developing Vietnamese forces? Maybe. I hate to second guess the military on that sort of thing but there was undoubtedly some ground for criticism but a lot of the criticism of Westy and the judgments on him, because he was formal, because he was, if you will, stiff in many ways, was I think misdirected.

RV: Barry, when you say that he was by the manual or straight out of the manual, was that a problem for—and this was obviously hindsight but was that a problem for fighting or directing a conflict such as what happened in Vietnam?

BZ: Well, perhaps not. Remember he was really Max Taylor's choice and his experience in combat had been in Europe, but then so was Abrams who was much better accepted by the critics. I don't know who we would have gotten who had experience, a track record, in insurgency warfare or in the kind of warfare that the North Vietnamese, that Giap was running and in pure military terms Westmoreland's efforts were very, what

shall I say, hemmed in by the ground rules. Cambodia and the Ho Chi Minh Trail was relatively free. There were black operations trying to intercept that. The access across the, what was it; the Forty-ninth Parallel (Editor's note: Interviewee is referring to the Seventeenth Parallel) from the North to the South was free. McNamara came up with that goddamn sensor barrier but that never really worked. Westmoreland had all kinds of restrictions on himself. He never had command of the air strikes. Those were controlled out of Honolulu or the ship commanders. Incidentally, one point I've been meaning to make, while I have great regard for John McCain he's always described as the ultimate war veteran. John McCain was never on the ground in Vietnam. He was a prisoner of war, he was an aviator, his plane went down and he was a prisoner of war for six or seven years, conducted himself with great heroism but he doesn't know a rat's ass about combat in Vietnam on the ground and that should be remembered. Chuck Hagel and various others were in combat on the ground in Vietnam. Point made.

RV: So they have a better feel for commenting on warfare today.

BZ: I would think so.

RV: At least warfare on the ground. At least combat on the ground. They have more of a feel.

BZ: Oh yeah, of course. John McCain is a Navy guy, a Navy aviator, Top Gun type. That's fine. Obviously no criticism of that but his experience is not ground warfare.

RV: Right. Okay, so General Westmoreland, by not controlling the air strikes, how much do you think that hindered him?

BZ: The supportive air strikes of the infiltration going on and so on was not under his command. The air strikes to the north were not his command. Those all came out of, well, initially the commanders in charge but also Honolulu. You know, in *Fortune* magazine there was a fascinating piece once on the management of the Vietnam War in which it was quite critical of the way it was being managed. Well, there were drawbacks. It was very complex, the command relationships. The role of the civilians and the ambassador, Westy had a collateral responsibility to the ambassador and while Lodge and Bunker left it pretty much to him, Max Taylor had his four stars shining through his civilian clothes so he was much more active in managing Westmoreland. Westy's, in

theory, command line ran through Ollie Sharp in Honolulu and then to the Joint Chiefs. But Buzz Wheeler, who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was out there it seemed like every other week telling him what to do. McNamara was out there telling him what to do. Everyone and his uncle, retired General Gavin I remember came out. We had seven thousand visitors one year, most of them military.

RV: Visitors just wanting tours, wanting briefings, wanting to go out and take a look?

BZ: Well, yeah, but also I'd always feel that to justify their trip they had to give advice.

RV: (Laughs) And how privy were you to those conversations?

BZ: It depends on who. I had enough of my own visiting media. I'd get a message, "Oh he'll stop on his way out. Please give him special treatment." Or someone would want to see the ambassador and he would call me and say, "Hey, this guy's in here. Get him off my back." Phil Habib once said, "Hey, some guy named Henry Kissinger's coming out here. You take care of him."

RV: And how much did you know of Kissinger at the time?

BZ: Very little. He was on special assignment. His secret mission was to talk to the VC to see if there was any ground for negotiation. His overt mission was to look at our Chieu Hoi program. I held a background briefing. It was supposed to be a quiet visit. Not secret but certainly not news making. I had a background program briefing for him at my residence, a lunch, and a select group was out there. I announced at the start, "This is background, no identification." Late arrival, Jack Foise, brother-in-law of Dean Rusk, *Los Angeles Times*, comes in, doesn't hear my ground rules, figures it's something like that. The next day the *Washington Post* runs a front-page story. They were using *LA Times* news service. A visiting Harvard professor said yesterday. Kissinger calls me and says, "Jesus Christ," the president gets on the line and says, "I thought I told you to be quiet and not get press attention." The next day Kissinger's walking downtown and his pocket gets picked. We knew enough then about the way Saigon works and I get my Saigon liaison officer to say, "Go to General Luan who is the Saigon chief. Tell him I want that pocketbook back. They know where the hell to get it."

RV: Did it happen?

BZ: Yeah. (Laughs)

RV: Was everything there?

BZ: I guess. I never heard a complaint from Kissinger. No one remembers that. The few times I've seen him since then at a council on foreign relations or something he'll say, "You're the guy who got me in trouble."

RV: You say that to him?

BZ: No, no, he says it to me.

RV: And what do you say to that?

BZ: I said, "No, no, Mr. Secretary. You got yourself in trouble."

RV: I'm sure he probably doesn't accept that.

BZ: No, I'm sure he doesn't.

RV: So the South Vietnamese government had picked Kissinger's pocket essentially?

BZ: No, but there were pickpockets all over Saigon and the South Vietnamese government knew who they were and put out the word, "We want this one back," and so they got it back.

RV: Well, Barry, maybe this is a good place we can break for today.

BZ: All right.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 8 of 11
September 27, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is Wednesday, September 27, 2006. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Barry is again in Washington, D.C. Barry, let's continue. I wanted to ask you before we move really into 1968 and beyond; if you could tell me about some of the individuals, some of the details and I guess your impressions of these individuals. We've mentioned a lot of them already but if you don't mind, let me go down the list here and let you tell me what your impression was of those people and you've made some comments about William Westmoreland. He was by the manual and very straightforward and I think that people today would like to understand more of who General Westmoreland was as a person versus the general. What did you see in him on a personal level? What kind of man was he?

Barry Zorthian: I regarded Westy as a friend. He became a friend. Obviously I didn't know him before I went to Vietnam. He did have—a shell would be too strong a word—a bearing that was straight military, very conventional, and certainly in public contacts of any kind. He was always very proper. If you got beyond that though and got to know him as a person he was quite warm, had a pretty good sense of humor and able to relax. Relaxing didn't happen too often. As Ernest Ferguson wrote in his biography of Westmoreland he was the inevitable general, always seemed to be not on stage but in his military role. His humor wasn't sharp but it was broad and he was very supportive of people he regarded as reliable and if you will supportive to him. I don't know how close he came to his generals. There was a whole generation of generals that served in Vietnam with Westy as the commander, punching their tickets, obviously getting it on their record, and eventually ran the Army in Washington for a number of years thereafter. A few of them wrote some bitter commentary about that whole CBS program that raised questions about the intelligence Westmoreland forwarded and so on, to a great extent grew out of a somewhat embittered G2, his intelligence chief who did not get promoted after his service in Vietnam and so held Westy to blame and so on. And there were a number of things like that but Westy operated by the book. As I say, if you got past that,

past his official role and character presence he was a pretty warm individual but that relaxation came hard to him.

RV: What do you think the trial with CBS did for him? What happened to him as a person as a result of this trial?

BZ: He was inevitably—and obviously I can't speak for him but my impressions—he was inevitably quite bitter about the criticism of him and even some demonstrations against him that came after he left Vietnam of his tactics, of his role and so on. He wrote, if you will, and gave speeches in his own defense explaining why he did certain things and the way he did them. He thought CBS's TV program was a deliberate effort and a distorted effort to question not only his performance but his entire character. Somewhere in those papers you're going to find the letter that I wrote when that came out to Bill Leonard, who was head of CBS news, that said, "Look, Bill, it's fair game to criticize Westmoreland and his tactics and his role is subject to criticism. But when you start charging that he distorted intelligence and sent the president of the United States false information, withheld information and various other aspects you're getting awfully close to treason and that isn't worthy of you, Bill, or Mike Wallace, the standards you have and you really have gone out of line." This is me talking now. But I think Westy felt the same way. I said, "There was this agreement of the nature and the numbers of 'the enemy,' the VC and the NVA, a good deal of discussion but it was well known to people who were covering Vietnam, journalists who were covering it. They analyzed it and sent a couple of clippings." Bill wrote me back a letter and said, "Unfortunately that show came up for my review literally the day before I was to retire." He did retire. He's now deceased. "And I just didn't give it enough attention." He didn't apologize for the show. He sent my letter to a producer, one of the producers of the show, I guess the executive producer who ultimately wrote me a letter justifying all the charges. I blame the show basically, on CBS's desire. This was a period when the whole Vietnam War was being dissected. CBS's desire to show shortcomings in the conduct of the war spurred on—oh god, what was his name? It will come to me about a half hour after you hang up—who had tried to sell his thesis of distorted intelligence to *Harper's Magazine* and then got picked up by CBS. It was a well-known very young critic of Westmoreland and really bitter about the whole war who worked for CBS then

as a producer and took this whole line of this whole approach of distorted intelligence and therefore false information to the president and so on finally got fired. He quietly got suspended and fired, largely for his performance on that show, although he did things later that were equally questionable. But that show, I don't think it was up to Mike Wallace's standards for whom I have considerable admiration, not that I know him all that well. I think Mike, while he takes responsibility for it was basically the reader for it, that the producers and the writers created the show and Mike essentially came in at the end and served as the on-air voice. The same thing happened incidentally to Peter Arnett later when he was literally fired and suspended for that show he did on—what the hell was the drug? Sarin? Being dropped on VC troops while they held some of our own people prisoners.

RV: Was he just an easy target do you think?

BZ: Whom?

RV: Westmoreland.

BZ: Oh yeah. He became a target. One there was no doubt he was relieved. Johnson kicked him upstairs to be Army chief of staff. But he became a target and because he was so much the conventional military man he became a target by the critics, the protesters of the Vietnam War because he was the commanding general and of the critics of the way the war was being fought, the so-called experts, because of his basic approach to the war. They accused him of using too conventional tactics, too much the lessons learned in the European war that were applied to the Europeans when World War II was in their contention. It didn't meet the needs in Vietnam.

RV: What did you think of that theory?

BZ: Having sat in on the mission council listening to Westmoreland's rationale, I understood and I guess accepted it. I don't regard myself enough of a military expert to say he was wrong. He did tend to be too conventional but the situation on the ground led to much of what he did. Initially when we were losing a friendly South Vietnamese, virtually a battalion a week, he brought troops in to protect the key installations, air bases, Binh Hoa, which had been attacked, the Da Nang airbase, et cetera. Their mission initially was to put a perimeter around those bases and put up a guard against VC or NVA attack. When that role seemed inadequate because VC and NVA forces were increasing

then he authorized U.S. troops to move out combat forces in support of the Vietnamese units in their campaign. When the Vietnamese didn't fill that role adequately he had to expand the U.S. combat missions even more into what became known as search and destroy. Go out and find North Vietnamese units and engage in battle. One reason he had to jack up the price of the mission continually until it became almost a conventional war was that the North Vietnamese and I've said that in writing, I've said it in the piece on Vietnam on Westmoreland's defense, which you'll find in there, the North Vietnamese kept raising the ante. Giap or whoever it was in command kept starting in the summer of '64 began sending in organized formal North Vietnamese Army units. Not insurgents, not VC—I haven't talked about these things for so long the words start getting lost—but the organized units coming in which was questioned by some of the leading—the accuracy of that claim was very much proven and our forces grew after the initial combat units came in in February of '65. Insurgents was the word I was looking for. Our forces grew to over five hundred thousand. I think the final figure at the peak was five-seventy or something like that. It grew to that level as a counter to the growth of the enemy, of the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army and the VC and the number of units they had brought in. The Army had a rule of thumb that defense, which is essentially what our role was in Vietnam, protecting South Vietnam; you need a ten to one ratio over the enemy that you're facing. That's a standard military doctrine. Well, the North Vietnamese and VC forces, and I'm talking about organized ones, not the insurgents and the pajama clad VC, certainly had a hell of a lot more than fifty thousand troops in uniform in South Vietnam on the offensive. So all this on Westy. Westy also was formal. Johnny Apple, in what I thought was not worthy of Johnny when Westy died. He just whooped it up. Westmoreland was more interested in having his uniform starched than whatever he issued. And [printed] right above it was a picture the *Times* ran in the obits showing Westmoreland out in the field in a very rumpled dungaree. There were stories that Gus Edwards, a general who I got to know pretty well after the war, tells a story. One day when Westmoreland was Chief of Staff sitting in Washington in his office a call came and said, "The president wants to see you right away." Westmoreland called his aide in and said, "See if my uniform's starched and pressed." Well, it's that kind of story that I once called the old box office movie on *Bright Shining*

Lie on Neil Sheehan book on John Paul Vann. The character who played Westmoreland made him a cardboard cutout, one of those cutouts you see on the streets of Washington of the president or someone next to whom you could take a photo. It was a caricature of a man. Sure, he was somewhat formal and so on but to say that was the measure of a man was an injustice to him and just wrong.

RV: What about Creighton Abrams? What was your experience with him?

BZ: I didn't get to know Creighton Abrams too well. He was a very good officer, quite a contrast to Westmoreland, very relaxed. One of his passions incidentally was classical music and he brought his record collection to Vietnam and when he did have time, which wasn't too often, he sort of relaxed by listening to classical music. But Creighton Abrams was much easier to sit down with and chat and relax. His approach to things was much more informal. There were those who will regard him in the long run as much better suited, a much better general, a much better "man" and much better suited to the type of war we were fighting in Vietnam. Now he got some of that credit because he emphasized one, he didn't get more American troops in. In fact, they began drawing them down. Two, he emphasized Vietnamization. But while he should take a good deal of credit for Vietnamization the concept of moving that direction began under Westmoreland. There were plans in that direction. Abrams certainly agreed with them, carried them out. Even though he was an armor specialist, the Abrams tank was named after him and led that famous march across northern Germany in World War II. Abrams began a tactics that the military say, and I guess correctly to the extent that I'm qualified to judge, were much better adapted for counterinsurgency, for the situation in Vietnam where much of the force was mingled with the government, fought at night, hit and run operations and so on. So my regard for Abrams was high. I respect him. I did not get to know him as well whereas in a sense I was Westy's PAO. But the time Abrams took over the Army had grown to such a degree that the public affairs role, the military role was independent of me. My oversight of it was virtually just nominal and Abrams had what I would describe as his PAO, Brig. Gen. Wyant Sidle, who also worked under Westy. Sidle and I got along fine but if there was a media problem Abrams didn't turn to me or didn't look to me for direction on what he should do with the media, he looked to

Sidle, so Sidle knew him much, much better than I did. And Sidle was a perfectly fine officer. We got along well.

RV: Going back a little bit in time, tell me a little bit about the command structure within the White House and who most impressed you, Barry, as far as thinker, as someone who could think in a larger context?

BZ: Well, that's hard for me to judge because the contacts were minimal. My area in the White House consisted initially of Bill Moyers, then what's his name came over. He had been assistant secretary of state, then became the editor of *Atlantic* magazine after he left government service. His name will come back to me in a minute. [Bob Manning] Whom I had known him both as assistant secretary of state and even before. The sort of special assistant for Vietnam changed at various times. Bill Trueblood and was there for a while but then Komer got that job. Komer was certainly the most vocal and a very bright guy I must say. While Komer, too, has become subject to the caricature he was also very bright and both analytical and perspective. The people overall responsible at the White House were first Mac Bundy as national security counselor and then Walt Rostow. Walt is a very bright guy. My ties to him again weren't close but they literally go back to New Haven, Connecticut. He was a classmate of my older brother's. The Rostow family was well known in New Haven. Walt was a very bright guy but he was very, very committed, almost to the point of self-denial to the problems of the Vietnam War. He was an optimist and saw the good in almost every development out there. He would brief some of the name journalists who came out to Vietnam for their brief tour and coverage and brief them with such favorable evaluations, such optimism, that they'd come by and say, "This is a different world from what we were told. They're not talking about the same war." The same kind of comments that goes back to that reported incident under President Kennedy where the senior General Krulak of the Marines, Brute Krulak, then a lieutenant general, and who was the State Department guy who went out there and later became counselor out there? Again, I'll think of it soon. He came back from a trip to Vietnam. This was before '63 obviously, during Kennedy's lifetime.

RV: Was this Taylor?

BZ: No, not Taylor. Taylor and Clark Clifford came out in the middle of the war under President Johnson. But he came and gave a briefing to the NSC (National Security Council) and President Kennedy is reported to have said something along the lines of, "Did you two visit the same country?" Because their evaluation, their reports were so different. One was very encouraging in military terms, the other very discouraging with emphasis on political development. And there was some of that even in Vietnam although the embassy political section and the military, at least in the early days, were much closer together, but a certain amount of the military being more optimistic than either the political section or the CIA. Now interestingly enough when I first got out there the political sector's eyes and ears on the provinces consisted of an unbelievably competent herd of young foreign service officers, very young, some on their first assignment, who came out and served in Vietnam with the mission of going out to the provinces away from headquarters, both embassy and MACV to get a feel for what's going on in the countryside. That corps at that time consisted of John Negroponte who is now director of national intelligence, Richard Holbrook; who was very, very prominent in later years and even currently on the Democratic side, Tony Lake who was National Security Advisor for Bill Clinton, Frank Wisner who became ambassador to the Philippines, Egypt, New Delhi, and later deputy secretary of defense and is now with AIG. Who else? Peter Tarnoff who finally became president of the Council on Foreign Relations and also under secretary of state for political affairs. That young group, they were sources of a certain amount of criticism, the critical output by the young Turk correspondents in that '63-'64 period.

RV: Who of that group would you say was the most outspoken?

BZ: Well I guess David Halberstan gets that. Number one, he had the *New York Times* as his outlet. Two, he's obviously a very skillful writer and a very good journalist and three, he was very critical and with a basis for his criticism. But he was one of them. Peter Arnett was in that group, Malcolm Brown, Neil Sheehan, Nick Turner, most of whom were there when I got there. David had been transferred although he came back several times. That period and most of the suffering in that period was by my predecessor, John Mecklin, but that period is covered in a book by Prochnau, P-r-o-c-h-n-

a-u. What the hell is that called? I've got a copy of it somewhere. I keep forgetting these things. We're talking about things forty years ago.

RV: (Laughs) That's okay, Barry. I'll find the title of that. You keep going.

BZ: I was reading it. It's the whole period. I don't think it ends right at Diem's assassination but it ends about that period.

RV: Okay. Tell me about Peter Arnett.

BZ: Peter was just by nature, I don't mean this physically, but belligerent, pugnacious New Zealander. He got into journalism for UPI almost by accident. He was rather short and had a boxer's face. I say that not critically but it was the nature of the man. He felt he had to prove himself. He did write critical pieces. He was a very good combat correspondent. I didn't think as much of his political product and I thought he wrote a couple of pieces that were really low blow. We knew each other there, got to know each other better after I came back. He told me once, "You know, if you had all treated me," you all being the media and the embassy, "treated me with a little more respect and so on I might not have been quite as negative, quite as critical in some of my output." I said, "Peter, to answer to that, I didn't invite you to the ambassador's background briefing or Westy's background. That wasn't my job. That was the AP's job. I invited the AP bureau chief and told him AP could have one person there and he's the one who always decided whether you should go or not." But Peter, along with Mal Browne who was the AP senior writer there and their resident photographer, again a non-American, which I don't raise, simply as criticism but it affects the outlook. A German, Horst Vas, a very, very outstanding photographer and photo editor, were among the, next to Halberstan, among the most critical reporters and journalists of that period. Eventually, while Peter left and came back, stayed even after the American troops withdrew, stayed for a while and married locally and stayed for a while after the South Vietnamese government gave up. Mel left in due time, Horst Vass left in due time, other AP people came in and while the AP didn't become cheerleaders they nevertheless were not quite as critical. UPI in a very competitive situation, a young reporter, at that time young, Neil Sheehan also was one of the critics. He came and he was eventually transferred. Neil had gone through Harvard, a very bright guy, a very good writer and

long after the war was horribly hurt in an automobile accident and is now recovered, wrote that book on John Paul Vann, *Bright Shining Lie*.

RV: What did you think of that book, Barry?

BZ: Well, you know, since I'd known John Paul pretty well and what his plusses were and what his minuses were was almost a book more on Neil Sheehan than on John Paul Vann.

RV: What do you mean?

BZ: He got into this book, probed very deeply, found out that this almost legendary military guy who came back after leaving the military for AID, John Paul Vann, had feet of clay. Lied about his military past, was a sort of unbelievably active womanizer, changed his outlook, became the greatest advocate when he was commander of II Corps of B-52 saturation bombing and tragically enough was killed in a B-52 bombing strike. John Neil was in effect let down by John Paul Vann and I think Neil's dismay at the truth about John Paul Vann, not necessarily rejecting his earlier comments on the war or his position. Nevertheless I think Neil's dismay shines through in the last part of that book. One part to me I thought was scandalous.

RV: I'm sorry, sir. Say that again?

BZ: The part where David Halbertsan asked to have any references to him withdrawn from the movie and Neil himself I don't think was very happy about the movie.

RV: How much input did you have in the making of this movie?

BZ: Pardon me?

RV: How much input did you have with the movie, Barry?

BZ: With the movie, none whatsoever.

RV: But as far as the showing of the movie?

BZ: Well, I saw the movie here in Washington. HBO has undertaken a program where some of these documentaries or fiction documentaries are shown here under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations and *Bright Shining Lie* was one of them. They accompanied it with a dinner for the membership, et cetera, et cetera. That's where I saw the movie first. On the podium commenting on the movie, certainly Jack Valenti was there. Someone else was there I forgot but they were quite critical of the movie and

Jeff Fewkes who's now president of Time Warner was then head of HBO and was sort of the supporter of that movie. Later I got word from him through one of his assistant VPs or VPs (vice president) or whatever saying, "Jeff says you are absolutely right. The movie was a bad, bad movie."

RV: What did you think, Barry? Did you agree with that assessment of the movie?

BZ: Of that it was a bad movie, oh yeah. I just thought it was badly done. I don't mind it being a book reflecting critically on the Vietnam War and the shortcomings of the effort and so on. That's fine. But it did it in such black and white terms. As I say, a figure like Westmoreland cut him out as a cardboard caricature figure of him and others. It was just done. The journalists were—it was all just too simplistic and inaccurate in that sense. You know, my basic judgment on Vietnam is there were neither all black or all white, whatever aspect. Vietnam was a war effort of gray, things to be said for, things to be said against, things we did well, things we did poorly, things the media covered well, things they did poorly. It was not a simple black and white situation experience undertaking.

RV: Tell me a little bit about Neil Sheehan. You said you did know him well and he put himself in that book. How should we remember Neil Sheehan? He's taught in courses on Vietnam as one of the top correspondents or the more important correspondents.

BZ: He was a top correspondent. He's a very bright guy. Maybe when I say I know him well it's a bit of an exaggeration. I know him, I'm fond of him personally, I think he's got integrity in what he writes and believes. I don't always agree with him but he has also matured. Remember in Vietnam, forty years ago, he was a young UPI and those were the days when UPI consisted of young correspondents trying to compete with AP and so on. He was a young UPI correspondent living on a shoestring in terms of comfort and facilities and all the rest and in some ways I find his criticism of the Vietnam War of the activities surrounding the war more valid than Peter Arnett. Now that may be unfair to Peter but I always get the feeling Peter's looking for things to criticize or was looking for things. "How can I make the U.S. look bad?" My greatest exchange with Peter in that regard was on the tear gas incident, whereas Neil seemed to me takes an

approach of, "What are the facts and is this really negative, bad, and so on?" That is oversimplified. Peter's looking for facts that make it look bad, Neil's looking for the facts on their own and if it ends up looking bad, fine, if it ends up looking good, fine. He didn't find too much that was looking good. Neil's a very decent guy and there's more substance to him, I think. He's not quite the sort of gung-ho workers that Peter Arnett represents. He's incidentally married to a very, again, first-rate writer, Susan Sheehan, who won her own Pulitzer. They're probably as far as I know it's the only couple who have each won the Pulitzer. But she's written some very good stuff on Vietnam and is quite the critic. There are writers on Vietnam who are almost forgotten. Frances Fitzgerald, on her book about the Vietnamese—oh, goddamn, Michael what's his name? Hare, Michael Hare and his book about the war. Even a woman called Adler who was writing for the *New Yorker*, she's now the movie critic. I'll think of her first name but she was out there writing about it. Michael Arlen came out and various others. All kinds of people came to Vietnam. I told you we had seven thousand visitors in one year, most of them military so I didn't have to worry about them but an awful lot on the civilian side.

RV: Yeah, that's a tremendous amount of people.

BZ: It is when you have to take care of them if they're on official business or media visits.

RV: How many people did you have who would help you with scheduling all these people, briefings and getting them in and out of the field. I know you said they could go out wherever they wanted to whenever they wanted to but didn't they have to get permission from somebody?

BZ: No, no. Well, later on, about '65, MACV set up the MACV accreditation system but it was easy enough to get accreditation. You simply needed some organization or a letter from any editor to say, "This is a representative of my newspaper or our service," and you've got your accreditation. That accreditation, one of the attractions for some of the many people whom I called non-journalists who got accreditation was that accreditation was good for the PX (Post Exchange), too, and a lot of these non-journalists only interests was getting access to the PX. The real journalists, many were stationed there. An awful lot came in for two, three, five, seven, one week,

two week visits and that had to have a trip to the field so I could say, "I went out and observed combat." I don't know how those journalists came to grips with Vietnam. They listened to their colleagues. This was sort of the herd effect. You went there, went out and saw a friend or went to one of the larger bureaus and said, "Tell me, how are things here?" They give you the whole thing. Some of it was very critical, some of it was positive but it was mostly criticism and then they'd say, "Well, I've got to take a field trip out to the field to sort of justify my being here." And they'd go out some place or other. If there were a TV crew they'd take some pictures, go home, do a little documentary for the local TV station. By Tet we had something like six hundred correspondents there but that included the guy who carried the camera, the guy who worked the teletype machine. Real, honest journalists in the sense, we're talking about a hundred or a hundred and fifty, that kind of number.

RV: Right.

BZ: Dwarfed later. The number of journalists in the Gulf War and initially the Iraq War was much larger than that.

RV: Tell me about a couple of other people that you've mentioned. Walter Cronkite, as a person and as a journalist.

BZ: Well Walter doesn't need any evaluation by me. He is the icon of television journalism and obviously the center of that I don't think hypocraphal, probably true story. Ask Jack Valencia about it. LBJ listening to him saying, "I think we can't win this war and get out," and LBJ saying, "If I lost, Walter Cronkite has lost." Walter came out. I don't mean this in criticism of Walter. I do mean as an example of setting in context a lot of his coverage in Vietnam. Hindsight, two examples, three points about Walter.

RV: Okay.

BZ: One is image of the war was influenced heavily by his briefing of the CBS Bureau in Saigon and the CBS Bureau—at that time I think it was Ed Fouhy. It may have been Peter Hereford—chief was quite critical of both the conduct of the war and the justification of the war. So Walter was briefed and this was not a matter of just reacting but was briefed in very negative terms. We also gave access to everyone we could. I'm not sure today who was on his list but he certainly would have seen and was welcome to the ambassador and General Westmoreland and so on. One of the things Westy was—

this was after Tet—one of the things Westy asked him on this question of whether MACV, the U.S. military and the Vietnamese anticipated Tet, whether their intelligence had led them to inspect it and whether they had taken that or put steps to lead us to be ready for it. He asked Walter to go down to II Corps, headquarters Binh Hoa, commanding general then lieutenant general later General Wyants who became Army Chief of Staff ultimately. And Wyants had anticipated something at Tet, not the specifics, but some kind of a major effort by the VC and NVA. And he briefed Walter and he showed how he had reacted, how he had moved units around, what steps he had taken, and he said effect—and I've got a signed statement that you'll find in those papers by General Wyants saying—he showed Walter all this, he showed that they were not caught unprepared, whatever the merits of the conflict they had had some intelligence so the charge of catching MACV and the Vietnamese completely by surprise was not valid. Wyants reports that Walter Cronkite said to him, "You may be right, General, but I'm not going to use this because I have concluded that this war cannot be won and I'm going to come out against it." Fair or not fair, I don't know, but there was a signed statement by General Wyants to that effect. Point three, CBS Bureau briefing, his rejection of Wyants briefing. This is not hypocraphal. Walter, in that famous footage where he stands up in front of the cameras with a helmet on his head and delivers that famous [line], "I feel the war against Vietnam and now a personal report and we can't win this thing. We'd better get out." Camera shuts down, Walter takes off his helmet, he's not too far from the Caravelle Hotel. He goes over there and joins the rest of the crowd at the bar and has a drink. Things in Saigon at that point were not so desperate as to justify helmets on, "I'm in combat," image. I think that's TV; it's effort to make everything as dramatic as possible. Sure the VC in Tet came into the embassy area, got into the gates, never penetrated the embassy itself. This is one of the big, at that time, issues. Did the VC penetrate the new embassy building? The marines who were safeguarding it say, "No. They got in the outer gate, they got to the ground floor door maybe but they sure as hell never got into the embassy." Alan Wendt, a young Foreign Service officer who drew duty that day by great coincidence in the embassy is still alive here in Washington. Two or three or four years ago he did a long interview in the *Washington Post* confirming that the VC never penetrated the embassy. I suppose an issue of very little importance they

sure as hell were on embassy grounds, dead all over. I had been at home. I wrote a letter about that night to Peter Braestrup and it's in his book that I have on the Tet offensive. You'll see in that letter I had tipped off NBC. That was the only one I could get through from my residence. "Actions are going on and you can call." George Jacobson had his house on the embassy grounds. George had that attack on the VC coming up the stairs where he killed someone. The embassy called them casualties on the embassy grounds. VC, I don't think there were any Marines then. I went down on that day after Tet. Westmoreland came by. He's talking to his troops and he's congratulating him for holding the fort, for holding the embassy secure and so on. But pictures are being taken, the mike is there and so on and the reaction in the world is, "Here's Westmoreland being unrealistic congratulating troops for protecting the embassy and for their nighttime and early morning defense of the embassy with bravery, et cetera, et cetera. And he's completely out of sync with the real world because the VC are all over Tet, attacking thirty-nine towns and all the rest." It was a very negative picture but nevertheless did not transmit the setting and the real situation, if you will. That part of Saigon was quiet at that point. Journalists lived in that area. There were a number of them. They covered in the midst of fighting around them. Obviously it's going to sound like the whole world's coming apart. Combat is underway. Tom Buckley of the *New York Times* writing at that time about Da Nang. Now in other parts of Saigon, down in Cholon area and so on, fighting was still going on. But Saigon was safe and secure at that time in that area where the embassy was, Gia Long Palace was and many of the government installations were but you would never know it from the coverage that emerged. CBS ran raw tape, unedited tape, of the early part of that fighting. It looked as if all of Saigon was going up in flames. It simply was not. Was it a good situation? No. But again I say the picture's gray, not black and white. Enough.

RV: Why was it portrayed that way, though?

BZ: Pardon me?

RV: Why was it portrayed that way, though?

BZ: It was portrayed that way because that was more of a story. That was the story that the journalists in that area were facing. They weren't—most of them, they weren't up in Hue or down in Da Nang or Cholon and so on. They were in that area.

That's where the fighting was going on. That's where the cameramen were. Tet was supposed to be a day of, if you will, not armistice but no negative action on things, which the VC violated of course. You can't hold them. There's no legal requirement for them to do that. It was against tradition. So what came out, because that's what journalists were facing was combat, and there was combat but within a couple of days all except Hue, the Cholon area of Saigon and a few other isolated spots were all quiet again. The VC had been set back. From the VC viewpoint a lot of their cadre which had been in the front were eliminated. The North Vietnamese, which were in the support position, largely survived. Tet destroyed the core of the VC, the southerners, a lot of whom had gone north at the time of the '54 partition and then come back south as VC and were the insurgents. They were very heavily killed off at Tet and the VC by all subsequent reports who were largely southerners resented the sacrifice of their unit, of their people, by the north. There's still a North/South conflict that goes on in Vietnam. The history of the South in, what shall I say, as offshoots of the North and in resistance to the North is historic. It didn't happen during our Vietnam War and certainly not subsequently, nor even in the nineteen hundreds. It goes back a long way.

RV: Tell me what you were doing that day, Barry, when the Tet attack happened in Saigon. Kind of walk me through what happened with you?

BZ: Well, if I remember dates correctly, January 31, 1968. Saigon was on holiday. You would let your help off, stand down on your offices. I'm talking about American installations. The Vietnamese military would grant leave to everyone. It was a joyous time. You'd buy presents, clean up your old debts, all the rest, it's Christmas, New Years and everything rolled into one. Tradition was even military operations on both sides would stand down. January thirty-first evening, George Jacobson who was then mission coordinator had a reception at his house for the guard in between, which was on the embassy grounds, the new embassy grounds, surrounded by a wall, a compound. And most of the mission senior officers were there. I'm not sure whether Westy went or not but it wouldn't have been surprising if he had stopped buy. Westy had issued an alert and he had talked to General Thieu, then president, to reduce the Vietnam military leave policy by 50 percent. Half the troops were off, the other half were on duty. American military were in theory on standby. Obviously individual commanders sort of

interpreted that however they wanted. I personally went to that George Jacobson reception on the thirty-first but it was one of those early things. A holiday was coming, a do nothing holiday. I went home. I forgot whether another USIA officer was staying with me then or not. I think Gene Rosenfeld may have been. But just sort of relax and take it easy. Late evening we start hearing reports of some military action, of shooting. I had two or three different phone networks in my house. One was the military, one was obviously the Vietnamese standard telephone, which let to the Vietnamese government and one was the embassy. I called the military, what do they call it, the combat operations center, I guess. "What's going on?" They said, "Well, we're getting reports of some attacks, some shooting, and so on." As evening wore on I kept checking back in. I was alone in my house then. More and more reports and obviously something was underway. No idea then that it was as massive and so on. Remember the day before up north in the northern part of South Vietnam there had been some attacks by the VC and NVA and we didn't know whether this was sort of a tail end of that or something new in itself. Well, whatever the time was, and you'd have to read that letter in Peter Braestrup's book, *The Tet Offensive*. I kept getting more and more reports through calling the MACV combat center and that it was growing so I started alerting key journalists, the wire services, the TV networks, all of whom also had been in a stand down phase and to tell them something's going on, and it's getting bigger and bigger. Then came MACV reports of attacks on the embassy compound so on my embassy network I got through to George Jacobson who was the mission coordinator, former colonel in the Army. He had served earlier in Vietnam as a colonel and asked him what the hell was going on. He said, "We're being attacked here at the embassy. My house is being attacked. I'm looking out the window and I see these figures moving around." I said, "All right, George, hang on. I'll get someone to talk to you." I tried going down my list to alert the media officers, the main ones. Most of them were already empty. People had gone out or they had gone on Tet vacation. I finally got through to NBC and I said, "Here's George Jacobson's telephone number. Give him a call for an eyewitness report for what's going on at the embassy compound," which they did and ran and it was a pretty good story. But that whole night up until early morning, dawn, I was on that phone handling calls coming in, providing whatever information I had, which was pretty

good but not complete by any means, and alerting correspondents, some of whom lived in the embassy area. A few had their reporters out in the field but not many. In the morning after reports that the embassy fighting had died down I decided to go down to the embassy grounds. Westy came over. He had been at headquarters all night but he thought he had better visit the embassy. Reporters were there of course. He held a very impromptu press session on the embassy grounds. Casualties, dead figures around. The Marines by all our reports had held firm. Westy, as I say, went through that, sort of speaking highly, complimentary, positively about the troops guarding the embassy, interpreted by too many of the press as unrealistic for them having gone through this combat experience, a lot of whom had never seen combat before. They were Saigon warriors and so that was the day. A day later we had a press briefing by Ambassador Bunker. I know what he said because I helped write it, which he obviously made some changes in. But in essence he said to the media was a limited number. "The VC, North Vietnamese, suffered a military defeat yesterday. Yes, conflict is still going on in Hue and a couple of other places but we have turned them back," and whatever the numbers are, thirty-eight of forty-one places, "and they have suffered high casualties. They expected a general uprising. We've seen no evidence of that but they have probably scored a psychological victory. The coverage in the West and in the United States particularly. It says here they've been able to mount a countrywide offensive and this demonstrates that we are not winning the war and it shows that the casualties in the U.S. in this war will be high. Now, they did not get their general uprising, they did not get their military victory, even in Hue, let alone Cholon, let alone in the delta, but what they did get was an awful lot of impact that the VC were still strong enough to undertake this kind of a major, major operation. It showed their strength and so on and that had an impact. There's no doubt in the United States public, let alone the Vietnamese public." We undertook at that point working very closely with Si Sidle, very forthright, honest briefings of the press on the Tet and its aftermath situation. The G3, Westmoreland's G3, an old, old World War II friend of mine, Brig. Gen. John Chasson of the Marine Corps did the briefing and he did a brilliant job and an honest job. A lot of his comments were kissed off by skeptical media who were taken with this image of the VC, mounting of forty-seven city offensive, forty whatever. But it was honest and straightforward and I

vouch for that and Si Sidle would, too, if he were alive. Did it turn opinion around? No, that impact was prevented. It wasn't until July of '68 that Charlie Mohr of the *New York Times* formerly at Time, Inc. whom I had known in India and we'd handled Henry Luce and John Kenneth Galbraith together, Charlie Mohr wrote a story that ran on the front page of the *Times* that Tet was a military defeat for the North and cited facts and figures, et cetera, et cetera. I'm not too sure how that ever caught on. Meanwhile, Neil Sheehan got a story that Westmoreland had asked for another hundred or hundred and twenty thousand troops. Neil was then working for the *New York Times*. That got on the front page and the country in effect, the U.S. in effect—I got back here at the end of August—said, "No more." The opposition was too great. No more U.S. troops. We went on with what we had, Vietnamization and so on in '72 when in my eyes Nixon and Kissinger sold out the Vietnamese in return for POWs (Prisoner of War), among them John McCain. We gave up the Vietnamese. The trade was as simple as that.

RV: This is you speaking, Barry?

BZ: This is me speaking. That was '72. We knew the Vietnamese couldn't last without us at that stage. Look what's going on in Iraq now with the Iraq Army. Finally President Ford, if you remember, asked for seven hundred million dollars in assistance to the Vietnamese logistic military as so on. Congress turned it down. The opposition to the war in colleges, the Lincoln Monument and Nixon and all of those other things took place and the North realized and then the South Vietnamese realized they had been sold out. They were through. The North moved down, Thieu tried to hold the line, he lost his northern provinces and then the whole thing collapsed and that was the end of the Vietnam War. And to me one of the great shames of U.S. history is that picture of the U.S. withdrawing from Vietnam, that one of the embassy roof. It wasn't the embassy roof actually, it was another building. A helicopter coming down and evacuating embassy personnel running out and I never reconciled myself to that image and presumably won't. Could we have won the war? I don't know. Ask Bill Colby. He wrote a book saying we'd almost won it. Others have. Walt Rostow has written a book saying in many ways—he's not so crass to say we won a battle to the war—in many ways we won by buying ten years for South Asia, for Thailand, for Indonesia and so on to get their governments to set their roots down. Vietnam itself, well, we've now reestablished

relations with them. Vietnam is about as communist I guess, or as aggressive. They tried to go into Cambodia and eventually got turned back and so on. He didn't make a very good case that our being there helped save South Asia from China at that stage controlling them. He did make a good case otherwise, I guess. Someday I keep thinking the U.S. Navy will be back in Cam Ranh Bay.

RV: Do you think it's possible?

BZ: Oh sure it's possible. Sure it's possible. We're doing some things, not much, with the Vietnamese military today. The Vietnamese have opposed the Chinese for a thousand years and that situation doesn't change. They don't want to be dominated by China but you're getting far off field.

RV: Yes. Well, why don't we go ahead and stop the session for today then?

BZ: All right.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 9 of 11
October 2, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is October 2, 2006. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Barry is in Washington, DC again. Barry, let's continue where we left off. We had been discussing the first initial attacks of Tet and where you were and what your day was like that day and then we kind of went on and expanded on some overview of the war itself and you concluded that Tet really was a huge defeat for the Viet Cong but it did turn the war. Could you elaborate a little bit more on what you think happened to the United States after Tet and after the counterattack, after we had come in, after the United States had come in and kind of cleaned house and counterattacked the Viet Cong and removed them really from the equation according the a lot of people's interpretation? Where did the United States go from 1969 forward? We'll get back to your personal story but I want to know what you saw overall. What were your opinions of that?

Barry Zorthian: First let me insert a few names which I couldn't think of last week. The man who went from the State Department to the White House sort of in charge of media in Vietnam and the whole area and wrote those directives, the NSC directives authorizing and so on, which we've discussed, was Robert Manning, ex of *Time Magazine*, went into the government and ended up as editor of *The Atlantic*. The two State Department people who were involved, the one that I talked about General Krulak and balancing State Departments out was Trueblood and the man in the White House before Bob Komer was Bill Leinhart. Incidentally on Tet, if you want any firsthand reports on what happened in the embassy in that first Tet attack, Alan Wendt, W-e-n-d-t, who was a young foreign service officer then, had drawn—because he was so junior—the Tet day duty and he was in the embassy on duty all through that night of the Tet attack. Alan is still in the Washington area. I saw him just the other day at the Council on Foreign Relations. He later became ambassador to Slovenia and so on but he's available if you ever want to talk to him. Now as for the Tet thing, yes, I say it was an overall military defeat for—and I use these words and the distinction should be maintained—for both the North Vietnamese Army, the NVA, and the VC, the Viet Cong,

who were more insurgents if you will, guerillas almost, where as the North Vietnamese Army were organized units. They were both set back. The biggest losses were to the VC and that was one of the complaints. The VC, who were largely southerners, were almost decimated because they were in the front of the attacks. I've forgotten the exact number of the attacks on that Tet Offensive but it was something like thirty or forty villages, no cities, certainly smaller towns and even some villages in that period. They were all beaten back by the defense forces, both the U.S. and the Vietnamese within the first two or three days, most of them the first day, except for the high visibility battles in Saigon itself, in the Cholon area, and in [Hue]. In [Hue] the Marine's battle went on for quite a few days. Again, I don't have the exact time but I think for about two weeks or so and the Saigon battle went on for several days. It was also the site of that very famous or infamous picture of Brigadier General Loan, the Eddy White picture, shooting a VC through the head.

RV: What kind of effect did that have, Barry, on anything that you were doing? Was that kind of damage control that you had to deal with?

BZ: Its effect was in the States and worldwide. Sure, it was noted in Saigon but Vietnam had been the site of so many wartime atrocities if you will, assassinations, killing by the VC and charges about the Vietnamese and even American forces that nothing was surprising. Loan was known as a bit of an eccentric, a real what shall I say, hotheaded type, and while no one welcomed that picture I guess they also weren't all that surprised that something like that happened. The impact of the picture worldwide, particularly in the U.S. was considerable, seeing war at its worst on the front pages in that graphic a form. That picture and the other infamous one of that naked girl who was six, seven, eight years old, running under a napalm attack were probably the two most damaging still photos that came out of Vietnam in my period there and I think probably during the entire war. Now, as I say, I think in the conclusion of military specialist observers was that Tet overall was a defeat. Papers captured during that fighting indicated, said, not even indicated that the North Vietnamese/VC expected a general uprising, an uprising by the people, particularly in the smaller towns and villages but even in Saigon, in support of the attack, but that never took place. One of the myths of the whole Vietnam period is that the hamlet, small towns, southern people of Vietnam

were all supportive of the VC. Certainly there were individuals and even some strongholds for the VC but as a generalization the villages, the hamlet people, the townspeople, were not supportive of the VC, nor does that mean they were supportive of the South Vietnamese government which we were supporting. You know the old statement in Vietnam that the emperor's rule stops at the entrance to the hamlet applied very much. Our feeling was that most of the people in the villages were much more interested in their daily lives and finding enough food to eat and their health and prosperity and their children than either the VC and certainly the government. There was an anti-central government bias, very deeply embedded in Vietnam. But getting back to Tet, the military if you will defeat of the NVA/VC was not accepted or judgment to that effect was not made by most of the media, that impact, that explosive offensive got the attention for its widespread application and for its attacks and the front pages of most newspapers in the U.S., certainly the *Post* and *Times* and so on, played that up. Tet was January thirty-one and February first. It wasn't until August that Charlie Mohr of the *New York Times* had a front-page story where he'd spent quite a period of time looking and saying that Tet was a military defeat. Tet was also a psychological defeat in South Vietnam in the sense that that general uprising in support of the attackers did not take place. Now where Tet was a very significant victory was its impact, particularly on the U.S. opinion and public opinion and probably of the opinion in most parts of the world. That psychological impact led to a vast increase. I think if you read polls up to that time, U.S. public majority supported the Vietnam effort. A lot of the debate became what we're now seeing in regard to Iraq. Do you stay the course or do you get out? The U.S. public was pretty much in support of the course, as was most of Congress. Now there were growing numbers of critics but up until Tet they were, I believe, in the minority. Tet affected and turned many people and many officials in Congress against our Vietnam effort and that of course as I say, was the impact of Tet. The Vietnamese used at one point North Vietnamese radio, which we used to monitor. The Vietnamese felt and stated—we heard it in broadcasts but I supposed in party or government documents and statements, that the media were an Achilles heel of the U.S., that impact in the media would effect U.S. policy and in that sense Tet proved them right.

RV: Do you think overall that the media's role played this huge role, that some claim that it wasn't an Achilles heel to the entire effort?

BZ: I think there are effects of the media but did the media turn the U.S. public against the war? My answer would be no. The media reported basically the facts fairly accurately. There were gaps in that just as there are in any extensive coverage but basically it was the facts of what was happening on the ground, what was happening in Vietnam itself that affected public thinking. Now, social historians will come up with all kinds of things. The increase in the number of body bags and the pictures of that, the reports on casualties, events like Tet, all that affected public opinion. The media was simply the messenger in this case, the transmission channel, not the creator of that. So while you say a fellow might claim the fact of reporting these facts indicated that the media was responsible, I don't think that's a valid judgment. I think the facts themselves are what eventually—now, media coverage may have intensified some of those reactions, made the facts more widespread and better known than would have been the case without the media, but no, I don't think the media created opposition. On the other hand the media's role wasn't positive either. It's not that they supported the war. I think, and again I'm talking about my four years when I was very close to observe and respond. The media was a reasonably accurate, reasonably overall impact in Vietnam. There were periods when media biases of just the mainstream media and some of the leading figures in the mainstream, media biases I think affected coverage and pushed it in a negative direction and there are those who say Vietnam was the first television war and that has an enormously negative effect by showing the general public a war in its rawest form. All that may be true and I would concede there was an intensification and probably broader awareness than had it been the case otherwise but the ultimate shortcoming and ultimate impact Vietnam in the public thinking came from awareness, knowledge of the situation, of the facts on the ground. Those facts, the positive aspects, the claim that we were winning the war, those facts improved only towards the end and in the '64-'65 through Tet period, most of the honest appraisals of the situation gave a fairly negative picture. You're getting much of the same arguments in Iraq today. The media doesn't cover positive things enough. Well, the positive things may well be there and some of them were there in Vietnam. But in balance overall is the situation properly projected to the

public. I think in Vietnam to a great extent it was. With flaws, with warts and all, with maybe oversight of some of the positive aspects but those years I was there were tough years for what was happening.

RV: Well how do you reconcile an open democracy and then the need for secrecy in some aspects of conducting a war and then the responsibility of the people in the media to perform their jobs and to get the information back to their public and how to reconcile that with what's going on in the embassy and what's going on on the ground at MACV? Then it kind of comes in a funnel to you. How do you balance all of this? I guess you could apply that across the years, across the ages in the United States and the way that we as a public want to know what's going on with our military and with our foreign policy.

BZ: It's one of the prices of democracy. If we have an open society in today's world I don't think a closed, a contained war is possible. I don't think censorship in its fullest sense is possible. Wars today are open wars. There can be limited situations where the conditions permit control of an extraordinary call of this kind. But by and large I would underline my statement that what you're suggesting, "How do you reconcile democracy and the need for if you will restriction and secrecy in wars?" My answer is you cannot close off, block off, put a wall around a war. Up until World War II and maybe through World War II you probably could because control of communication was a physical body of people on the battlefield was possible but not in today's world. Now, having said that, the media, and I think Vietnam was a very real example, the media has accepted and observed restrictions on military information of a tactical nature, the release of which, publication of which, would conceivably harm and endanger the lives of troops or jeopardize operations. We never had censorship in Vietnam. We did develop a set of ground rules on tactical military information. The press, with only a very minor number of exceptions accepted and observed those rules. You can find a pretty good report recital of this aspect of the war in Bill Hammond's single volume, his first book, rather than the official history on the Army and the media in Vietnam. I would note for you when I say situations change that the American public, an open government; this is the price we paid for that, never has accepted full censorship in a war. It has accepted what was observed, the protection of tactical military information. But this goes back to World War I. In World War II there was certainly criticism, discussion,

protesting against the war. The battlefield censorship that Eisenhower imposed or that he imposed in the Pacific was of tactical military information and what I'm really saying is not only is that still valid but it's even more open today because of television, because of technology, than it was in that period. The last formal censorship we had pre-transmission radio was during the Korean War. We certainly didn't have it in Vietnam and while there may have been restrictions on certain information, non-tactical information, in both the Iraq wars, there was not formal censorship, complete censorship. The first Iraq war had public affairs officers accompanying reporters when they visited either the carriers or the divisions. They had pre-screening of copies, they had physical control in Saudi Arabia and we were aware of those press sensors. Is this good or bad? That's not the question. It is. If we want an open society, a "democratic" government, that's the price we have to pay so totalitarian, authoritarian governments, can control things much better. The Chinese certainly could, the North Vietnamese certainly could. Correspondents could not go on the battlefield unless they were approved and their copy was certainly reviewed before merging. The actions of their military, atrocities in the villages, assassinations, battlefield defeats or victory was all reviewed before it was distributed to their public so their publics never got the full picture of their side of the war and they got only negative pictures of the other side, if you will the American and South Vietnamese side. Now, even that's changed. A lot changed during Vietnam, of radio broadcasts going in, today you get the Internet, you get television via satellite and so on, so even in authoritarian countries it's going to be very difficult, if not impossible. You can try jamming, you can try to block the Internet, you can try all kinds of things, but the control, the distribution of information is becoming increasingly difficult. Authoritarian governments can do it better than open governments which have their hands tied. What's that do? It puts the premium on. If you don't do it on principle you better do it as a practical matter. It puts the premium on the provision of information by the government to be truthful and candid if you will. There has to be a relationship between what you're issuing as official statements, official reports of the official government and the reality on the ground. In the Vietnam War that issue became known as the credibility gap. What you say officially, what you do officially has to dovetail, has to coincide with what the reality on the ground is because the reporters on the ground looking at it or someone and

any diversions, any significant difference is going to affect your standing, your credibility if you will. That was the challenge we had in dealing with the media and through the media with the general public, both incidentally in Vietnam and the world as the U.S. in the job I had. I think by the time I got that assignment and got the authorization the directive I received, both the policy directive and the role it gave me, which we've discussed earlier, were based on a realization of what I've just said, maximum candor with minimum security. We tried to apply that. Did we do it successfully? Well, certainly had a lot of critics. I also think we had a lot of appreciation for their efforts. Was it nice, neat, tidy? No, it was not. War isn't neat and tidy. Coverage of it isn't neat and tidy. Control of information is nowhere near complete. It is an open war. You're going to find differences, you're going to find critics, you're going to find naysayers. Are the media going to look for them? Yes, they are. How is it on the overall balance? What this needs is a knowing public, a public that can if you will receive that information, weigh it and come up with an accurate reaction. Is that the case always? Of course not. You hope it develops. Enough lecture.

RV: (Laughs) Well that's what you're here for, Barry. Let me ask you then, going forward, did you see changes in the way the media covered the war post-Tet? After Tet was done and after everything intensified with the coverage, after the Johnson administration left office and the Nixon administration came in what did you see as far as changes?

BV: Well, there were various periods on media relations in Vietnam. There was first the young Turk and Mel Brown through the Diem period. Very critical and got very negative because of the lack of that projection of the reality on the ground. Then when I got into my job and was able to release a lot of information, be more honest, be more if you will reflective of what was actually happening, media relations improved quite a bit. Not completely but quite a bit. Furthermore in that second period as the war increased American troops came in and so on, a larger number of correspondents were assigned to Vietnam and some of them were of the older generation, more prone I think to accept and at least acknowledge the government's version of events through '67. When we had that election, the election was handled quite badly and skepticism of the journalists grew watching us trying to impose democracy in Vietnam. And the results of the election

which endorsed the military powers then in office as "elected president" instead of prime minister and so on got a very skeptical reaction. Whenever anything positive was said in that period, either about the military situation which we thought was improving—not resolved yet but improving, the press would tend to overreact to it as statements of optimism, particularly true about a speech Westmoreland gave to the National Press Club here. I guess it was December of '67 and some statements that Ellsworth Bunker made back here, not incidentally at the urging of President Johnson, which I always felt the press over interpreted as claims of early victory, great progress in Vietnam and so on and these sorts of expectations were built up. Then came Tet suddenly and had an impact. We'd been fed a false line of great success in Vietnam. There was a lot of media reaction of that type and that grows the skepticism and criticism that the government was lying, the military particularly, about events on the ground, that the reality on the ground contradicted all these official statements about them, was a tone that particularly with a lot of new reporters coming in and turnover in the media was an approach in their tone that the media adapted to a much greater extent, much more critical extent after Tet. Furthermore the military was deteriorating. Remember we were into the draft by then. The U.S. socially was going through that marijuana period, of drugs and so on. A lot of that transferred into these young kids drafted into the military unhappy about being out there. The Army, I'd say in late '68 or '69 went down hill fast. We had that Charlie Company thing by Jack Warrant that was almost a revolt by a young draft company against its officers, we have fragging of officers, we have questionable performance on the battlefield. That fed the media critics, a lot of whom had not known how bad things had been in '65. They were new to the assignments there and so the media turned almost hostile to the government. I was gone by then. Others were—I don't think the government handled the situation all that well. Si Sidle told me after the war that the Pentagon got into the habit of massaging statistics that came in from Vietnam. I don't think they had done that in the '65-'68 period. Maybe, but we certainly weren't massaging them in Vietnam despite the charges in that CBS television show. So the media and the government if you will officially grew apart. Furthermore the information effort fell almost exclusively in the hands of the military. There were still civilian aspects to it but the civilian, by '69, side of Vietnam had grown so small. As I said before,

people forget that up until then, particularly '64-'67 the Vietnam effort was a joint civilian military. Westmoreland even had a deputy, an ambassador, first Bob Komer and then Bill Colby as a deputy commander of MACV. And before that we had a deputy ambassador whose job largely was to work on rural pacification.

RV: Was it a problem having the military in charge of most of the media relations later?

BZ: Well, problem would be the wrong word but the military's—I don't want to make this a general condemnation—but the military's record of candor on military operations is not consistent. There were periods in Vietnam where I'd have to test. For instance when Brigadier General John Chaisson, the three of MACV Marine was doing the daily briefing on Tet results, he was very candid, very forthright, very honest but as a general statement the military tended to not lie but certainly present the more favorable interpretation of things and to that extent the military's credibility in Vietnam had deteriorated considerably because of some of these developments I'd mentioned. So to that extent the military's sort of assumption of responsibility for information was a problem. Now the military has taken over in Iraq today. There are civilian aspects again but I now I keep hearing more and more stories about the military's presentation, the casualty figures that they're massaging one way or another and so on. True or not, I don't know but the military's reputation in that period on presentation of information about military operations was heavily questioned.

RV: Okay. In 1968 when you were on your way out of Saigon and on your way out of the role, did you feel like you were not ready to leave? Was this something you wanted to stay with or had you had enough of what was happening?

BZ: Well, I certainly had enough in one sense but I was also obviously after four years there very involved, very committed. I had great loyalty to the ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, for whom I had great regard. I hated to leave what was in the middle of this enormous effort. On the other hand my phase of the war, the build-up to the point of mid-'68 was obviously over. We were in a new phase of the war after Tet. I'd been essentially absent from my family for well over three years. My wife wasn't complaining but I remember a couple of messages from my older son saying, "Dad, you've got to come home." Add to that the fact that my agency, the USIA, felt I'd been there too long.

I'd used up a lot of my credibility with the agency, which is inevitable in that, kind of a job, and in effect I was pushed out of my USIA role. A new PAO was brought in. I shifted over and became special assistant to the ambassador at his request to be in charge of media relations. But that was an awkward situation because both the civilian side had the PAO and the military side had a general in charge so that role had certain limitations and restrictions which made it much less, if you will, satisfying in professional terms. That's when Westy and Bunker recommended—they were setting up the commander if you will of each of the four corps and recommended I be named commander or in charge of IV Corps. In civilian terms it was ambassadorial. But given all these factors I finally came and agreed with my agency, USIA, that it was time for me to leave and I think Ambassador Bunker, and I would say this is a bit of editorializing, I guess, reluctantly agreed. He was very supportive of me. He was the one senior official—he and Bob Komer came down to see me off when I left. We stayed in touch. When he came back to the States we saw a good deal of each other. But I did get out. That's all. And because the war changed my time had changed. If you looked at it objectively and put aside personal emotions and attachments and feelings, as I say it was time to go. Four and a half years at that kind of a job is I'd say almost impossible.

RV: Did you find yourself really at a point where you're physically and mentally exhausted or were you simply ready for all the other reasons you've stated? I guess I'm asking was your physical and mental state part of, "I'm just exhausted. It's time for me to step aside?"

BZ: Well, that is certainly true but I was relatively young then. I would take a while longer than it would today. (Laugh) No, no, I was exhausted. Those jobs are twelve hour a day jobs, seven days a week. There's no time off or weekends off. Occasionally you'd get a break. I'd go over to the Philippines to see the family but not much of that. No, I was physically exhausted and probably mentally exhausted because you go through the same kinds of challenges, the same kinds of negative problems or difficult problems time after time after time and it takes its toll.

RV: Barry, tell me about Ellsworth Bunker. How would you describe him? What do we need to know about him?

BZ: Well, I think we've talked about this before but let me say this. I had the great good fortune in my foreign service seven years or eight years of working for five ambassadors, none of whom incidentally were career foreign service officers. They've had various deputies and so on. But John Kenneth Galbraith, Chester Bowles, Henry Cabot Lodge, Maxwell Taylor, and Ellsworth Bunker, in terms of all of these five, would be what the Asians call notables. Every community, in addition to official officials there were notables. When there would be public events notables would always be invited. They had done something or other in their lives of note. Of these five ambassadors, all of whom I admire and have personal liking and got along with well and had different characteristics, Ellsworth Bunker was the most notable of them all. He was a very real old fashioned patriot, took on this record, doesn't need any recital justification, had all kinds of difficult assignments. Personally he was a very warm, very generous individual. His image was—I think the Vietnamese used to call him the refrigerator. His image was one of very distant, proper. People used to think he was from Vermont or Maine and actually he was born in Yonkers, New York. He was the classic old-time, northeastern, if you will Republican establishment. He went to Yale, and that was a great personal tie between us. He had personal enthusiasm for Yale. We ran into each other actually in '66 when we both had reunions and he was back there before he became ambassador. I had very great admiration for him. He was warm, warm person. One of my sharp memories, he was then, I don't know, seventy-something or maybe eighty, but I remember a reception in Saigon. Carol Laise, his second wife—his first wife Harriet Bunker, we did not meet in Delhi. They had left Delhi before we got there and then she had died and he subsequently married Carol Laise who had been the political officer, the State Department career political officer and subsequently named ambassador to Nepal. Ellsworth Bunker and I never called him Ellsworth, needless to say. It was always sir and Ambassador Bunker. I had too much respect for his position. But he said, "You know, when I got to Nepal the Chinese put up publicity that I was sent there married to Carol in order to have a listening and viewing post on the borders of China so I could report back to Washington what they were doing. That this was a marriage of convenience, not of love." He said, "Little did they know." And it was just typical, sort of low-key joke and he was always that way on a personal basis. He had a very refined

but very real sense of humor but he was also very proper. He'd send cables to the president talking to the president like a Dutch uncle. "Mr. President, if we stick with this we'll come out on top." He was very firm but very skillful in dealing with the Vietnamese. He told me once in all these diplomatic negotiations he had had to undertake in various assignments he said the key to success in solving a difficult problem is to determine what is the minimum each side can accept and live with and then try to work towards an agreement in that regard. He did not have the sort of warm, personal relationship Lodge had with a couple of the Vietnamese political generals. He did not have the military credentials Maxwell Taylor had but he had the very real sort of elder advisor and statesman, proper approach to who were so young in relation to him and so limited in experience. Obviously from what I said I had great, great admiration for him and personal liking, which is very critical in relations in an embassy like that.

RV: When you came in country you had contact with some of the real original influential people who were there and I remember seeing on your office wall in Washington, DC on my visit with you last year a picture of some of these individuals. Of that team, that original team in 1964, besides the ambassador, who stood out as one of the big go-getters? I remember you mentioning something about Ed Lansdale being this type, someone who was kind of pugnacious, ambitious, experienced, but had a very unique personality. But who of that group stands out to you today looking back?

BZ: The initial group—I got there in the midst of a turnover in the whole mission council. They'd gone through the Diem period, the assassination period, Nolting being the former ambassador was gone, Henry Cabot Lodge had come in. The mission council was being turned over. Gen. Paul Harkins was commander of MACV. What was his name at AID, Joe something? John Mecklin, my predecessor, was the PAO. Changes were on the way. Of that group, except for Westmoreland who arrived two weeks before I did, Jim Killen became head of the AID and Al Hurt was brought in as his deputy. Pierre DiSilva became the CIA station chief. The earlier group, what was his name, not Joe Brandt, head of AID. The earlier group, I never got them very well. We were still in a period then in '64. I remember the farewell for Paul Harkins was a black tie dinner. This in the midst of a war. But it was the old French habit. You went into the city, had a formal dinner and so on and then in the morning got dressed in your fatigues and went

out and fought a war. It was still that period. Cabot Lodge was still sort of taking over. One of his aides incidentally was a fellow named Mike Dunn who later became military assistant to Spiro Agnew, finally made major general before retiring. I saw him again in Washington. Initially Mike Dunn and I tangled a bit at the reception. He said, "Gosh you think you're going to do anything here just don't get over-ambitious." I said, "Listen, Mike, I didn't ask for this assignment. They don't want me here. I'll leave tomorrow. But meanwhile let me do my job." And we got along great after that. But Henry Cabot Lodge trusted only Mike Dunn. He didn't trust anyone else on that mission council. He had come out on these very restrictive instructions from the president and State Department to take over. The mission council was not dysfunctional, that's too strong a word, but they were still certainly at each other's throats. David Ness was in there as DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). I remember once David Ness set up a meeting of the new deputies. Westmoreland, me and Al Hurt to discuss coordination in the mission and so on. And Henry Cabot Lodge said to him finally, "I'll call all the meetings around here. I don't want you to be going off and doing things like that on your own." About three months later David Ness was sent off. He became DCM in Egypt finally but it was not a happy outing at that time. Jim Killen finally gave way to Charlie Mann who gave way to John McDonald. John McDonald was great. Charlie Mann was all right but I'm not sure he ever enjoyed Vietnam. But we finally got a mission council team that pulled together. Max Taylor, even if he was in civilian clothes, his four stars always shown through his civilian clothes. He pinned three of Westy's stars on his shoulders so he had no hesitation in getting into the military aspects of it.

RV: Sure. Tell me about Ed Lansdale.

BZ: Ed Lansdale. Everyone was looking for formulas. How do we work this thing out in Vietnam? Ed Lansdale had built up a big reputation in the Philippines working with Magsaysay on anti-guerilla activities and had been very successful in a sort of personal approach to things. "Let's get in with the local culture and the local thinking," and so on. The Pentagon was pushing to get some kind of effort in Vietnam that would communicate with the VC and the insurgents in the hamlets and so on. So Lodge was urged to bring in Ed Lansdale and Ed Lansdale, I remember having lunch with him at the Hay Adams Hotel in Washington in '65 when I was home on some kind

of consultation. Ed Lansdale was pressed and assigned to come out, to bring a team out, to give some direction to the mission efforts in communicating and dealing with insurgents, the guerillas, the village hamlet people. The trouble—and he did come out under Lodge. Zalin Grant has written a book about—what's the title of it? *Phoenix Effort* or something.

RV: *Facing the Phoenix*.

BZ: *Facing the Phoenix*, claiming that Phil Habib and I undercut Ed Lansdale. I say not true. What I do say is as for his approach to counterinsurgency became irrelevant. Not his fault but the change in the Vietnam situation. And while Ed and his team, which included one of my ex-colleagues, Hank Miller from Voice of America days in the fifties in New York plus people like Dan Ellsberg and a lot of others, were sitting in their house singing folk songs and doing what they had done so successfully in the Philippines. The war was moving towards conventional warfare again, the North Vietnamese Army coming down across the border in organized units. So Ed, while he was there and he got it because of his personality and so on, a certain amount of press attention, and sat in on the mission council meeting, I never felt was a real factor in Vietnam and I never felt he made a real contribution. Now, his people would dispute that and if you talk to Dan Ellsberg today he'd say, "Well, we had the real answers," and so on. I just don't think so. I never had any personal animosity towards him but Hank Miller, my old colleague, who was supposed to be Ed's information specialist, kept criticizing JUSPAO's efforts as inadequate, uninformed, impractical, and so on. And maybe he was right. Maybe we were too western minded and not enough Asian minded but I didn't think they helped the effort a hell of a lot. But they continued through with their little niche in the house they lived in, getting together with various Vietnamese and to a certain extent being able to communicate to the ambassador various steps, various approaches, various sensitivities about the Vietnamese that they said the official Vietnamese channels didn't dare say to the ambassador or to the establishment. I don't think they ever had a real, even though Ed had been a major general in I guess the Air Force, I don't think they ever had any impact on the military operations. It just wasn't Westmoreland's style to have someone like Ed Lansdale singing folk songs in his staff meetings and that type of thing.

RV: Okay. Barry, would you like to go ahead and stop for today?

BV: Yeah.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 10 of 11
October 13, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history interview with Barry Zorthian. Today is October 13, 2006. It's 9:20 AM Central Standard Time and Barry's in Washington and I'm in Lubbock again. Barry, tell me about leaving Vietnam and how that happened and your decision to give it up.

Barry Zorthian: For one, I would note for you somewhere in those papers probably pulled out in that special packet a long memo I wrote to Ambassador Bunker, which said in effect—this was after Tet—"Let's go to the Vietnamese leadership and in effect say. 'Either get your act together. Cut out this rivalry between you and starting working and pulling together this government and the military or we're going to get out of here.' We've paid our dues; we've given them the opportunity." That memo didn't go anywhere but about that time if you remember LBJ had turned over the task of coming up with recommendations to the so-called Thirteen Wise Men. The Wise Men in turn sent out Phil Habib, George Carver, and Gen. Bill DePuy as the team to come out to Saigon and talk to the people in Saigon to get their ideas and so on. Because of my former connections with Phil I had long talks with him and I don't know how much I affected his thinking because he was a pretty perceptive guy himself but nevertheless had the opportunity to put in my input.

RV: What did he say to you, Barry?

BZ: Well, "What is to be done? What should we do here? This is after Tet. What was the significance of it?" And so on. I don't know that anyone in Saigon said, "Let's cut and run," to use a favorite expression. But an awful lot said, "We've got to bring a lot more pressure on the Vietnamese to become more effective to the Vietnamese government." We had gone through that election previously when it was November and it had been not quite a farce but certainly not any election you would boast about. The Vietnamese military Thieu, Ky and their colleagues were still in charge and in power. Ky and Thieu were feuding and this obviously affected the Vietnamese government performance and the military's performance. Phil was very sensitive to all this, having served out there, as was DePuy. Likewise was George Carver who was the CIA man and

they were not innocent about this situation so they probed it and looked for any signs of correction, adjustment, on the part of the Vietnamese, as well as talking or considering any adjustments that should be made in U.S. policies and approaches. There was renewed emphasis on Vietnamization, renewed underlining of the fact that this had to be turned over to the Vietnamese to correct. Much of our debate today about Iraq reminds me of a conversation that it's amazing how the process, the unfolding of the Vietnam War compares to the unfolding of the Iraq War. There are obviously major differences but an awful lot of similar things. You now have this Baker/Lee Hamilton group looking at the Iraq War. That is the equivalent of LBJ's Thirteen Wise Men. Now, in the midst of all this it also became clear to me personally that my time was over. My war was over.

RV: How did it become clear to you, Barry?

BZ: Simply because we were entering a whole new phase. The military had grown enormously. It was over five hundred thousand. We had had Tet and frankly Washington was getting tired of me. Years later Leonard Marx told me, who was then director of USIA, that the president had thought I had been out there too long. There were a lot of people in the business of communicating the administration who weren't happy about coverage coming out of Vietnam who thought I should have handled it better. The military was unhappy with the, or parts of the military were unhappy with the degree to which I and my staff as civilians were handling military issues in the war. Furthermore, the people I was associated with had come to an end. Westmoreland was on the way out, there was a change coming in to the whole mission council. USIA, my parent agency, felt our Vietnam effort was taking too much of its resources of the budget and so on. As I've said before, Westy and Bunker through bureaucratic events, since the ambassador didn't want me to leave, nevertheless USIA sent over a new PAO, my second half, my USIA half, Ed Nichols, who took over after Tet. He had been scheduled to come in. He took over after Tet and took on USIS. Ambassador Bunker sent a special cable back saying, "I want Zorthian to stay on. We'll call him my special assistant for media relations." That was approved. I moved out of my offices in the USIA building, took an office in the embassy building, then Ambassador Bunker and Westmoreland recommended to Washington that I be appointed—I've even forgotten what the title was—director of IV Corps, the Delta Corps. They wanted a civilian to head up the IV

Corps. The other three Corps, I, II, and III were all headed by generals. This was an ambassadorial level appointment. I'm not sure I ever saw an answer from Washington to that request. Westy left. I had gotten some messages from my family saying, "Enough is enough. You've been there for four and a half years." It all added up to, "Get out. There's a new war starting, a new phase of the war." So I left Vietnam, the decision was made in July, July seventh at one o'clock in the embassy mission council plane for Bangkok. My wife Margaret and our younger son Steve—our older son had already come back to the States for school a year earlier. My wife Margaret and younger son Steve came over from the Philippines that night and spent the night in Saigon and the next day, I think it was a Sunday—in any event, July seventh we took off for Bangkok. To my great appreciation Ambassador Bunker came down to see me off, as did Bob Komer, the old hand who had been there. But that was it. Four and a half years, got out of there, feeling I had done a reasonable job but certainly not a successful one. People were concerned about the reaction of the standing of the U.S. today overseas. Forget that period of Vietnam our standing overseas, let alone within the U.S. was not very positive. Demonstrations, the rallies against the U.S. in Vietnam, both domestically of course but also here. The embassy—and as you go through papers and books and so on you'll see a lot of my comments on this whole period—my agency began authorizing my return to give me some time to decompress, if you will, gave me the assignment of doing an inspection in Europe and I was assigned to inspect the operations in the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. My other son and my mother-in-law came over from the States, joined our family in Europe, and we spent two or three weeks in Europe. One, I was doing my daytime job with the inspection but relaxing. The posts I visited in Europe by and large had me give briefings to both the embassy staffs and the media in those countries or various other audiences. Obviously not applied to embassy staffs but the other groups were generally hostile. I don't mean rude to me personally but very critical of the U.S. in Vietnam.

RV: How did that affect you, Barry? How did you take that? Were you kind of defensive about that or did you kind of let them say their piece and not respond? How did you handle it?

BZ: I handled it to the best I could and gave justification to what we were doing, and the key thing of providing some cover, if you will, for the South Vietnamese to determine their own future without the pressures from the North, without the attacks from the North. I was aware of the depth of the opposition in the U.S. and by extension in Europe. I had been made aware of that when after Tet in April while Saigon was under curfew, came back to the States for consultation for a few days, landed in Washington and drove through a curfew in Washington. This was the curfew after the Martin Luther King assassination and the outbreaks brought violence in Washington. I went to the airport in Saigon in my civilian car. I came in from the airport in Washington in a military vehicle, or it at least seemed a military vehicle. Then I went up to New England. Our son was in school at Andover, saw him, but stopped off in Boston to call on my old boss, John Kenneth Galbraith, who invited me to dinner at his residence, at his home, and had a number of people as dinner guests at that time. I was taken aback at how deep the opposition, the criticism of our efforts in Vietnam were, deep and bitter. Now this was New England and I guess Harvard and Cambridge were particularly susceptible to that kind of reaction. But it was the first time—sitting in Saigon in a way you're protected from this criticism and you're in a cocoon there. While we would see periodic media coverage from the States the depth and the intensity of the criticism developing after Tet was hard to gauge and hard to feel in Saigon. So that April trip back to the States is what really reinforced that aspect to me. Then I had taken in May I guess it was a side trip to Hong Kong. My wife Margaret had joined me and our son Steve from the Philippines. We were in Hong Kong at that Oceanside shopping center that they used to have in Hong Kong when word came through of the assassination of Kennedy, Robert Kennedy. Again, a real shock and an indication to some extent of the opposition to the U.S. government action. So when I got to Europe in July and August of '68, while the depth of the opposition was more than I had thought, nevertheless that there was widespread criticism of the U.S and very bitter criticism was not surprising. Now, pursuing that outline of thought, can we recover from the present situation in Iraq? Yes, if we adapt the right policies, the right approach to foreign affairs and our relations with other countries and our actions to international issues. We did after Vietnam. This was in '70. My leaving was in '68, we got out of Vietnam in '72. In the nineties when the Berlin

Wall came down our reputation and standing worldwide had been largely restored. Not perhaps in the Middle East because of our policies in the Israeli/Palestinian situation, but as a general statement worldwide U.S. reputation had become largely positive. At any rate we spent July and most of August in Europe, went through Istanbul, Geneva, Brussels, the Scandinavian countries, London, and so on. We got back to the United States. We were staying temporarily on our first day back at the apartment my wife's parents owned in New York. We walked into the apartment, dropped our suitcases, turned on the television, and there were riots in Chicago at the Democratic convention.

RV: That had to be a bit unsettling.

BZ: It sure was. We wondered what we had left and what we'd gotten into. That was that horrible '68 Democratic Convention in Chicago with Daley in that front row calling Ribicoff a fink and police outside in the park manhandling demonstrators. A lot of it again on the Vietnam War. I had been assigned—in those last few months a number of job offers had come up. One, Henry Cabot Lodge then was ambassador to Germany and he accepted me as a PAO, concerned again about my lack of language in German but enough Germans spoke English there wasn't a major problem. Alec Johnson was then ambassador to Japan and when the German thing didn't turn out he accepted me as PAO in Japan. And I guess as a—I didn't want to be PAO in another country or in another post but there wasn't much left in attractiveness in that kind of an assignment to me after four years in Vietnam as the key PAO job in the world. I was offered an ambassadorship. When President Johnson asked me to stay on in Guam in '67 the implication was if I stayed long enough at the end of it there'd be an ambassadorship as a career foreign service officer. Dean Rusk and the State Department were among those who weren't very happy. Dean Rusk, as I may have said earlier, was quoted at a staff meeting when somehow or another my—they meet daily, the assistant secretary of state level and up—somehow or another my name came up and Dean Rusk was heard to comment or reportedly commented, "Well, that's that son of a bitch out in Saigon who thinks the people have a right to know." Dean Rusk was the source of that I think accurate quote to the media saying, "When are you going to get on the team?" Very, very disturbed, probably more than the military about the nature of the coverage out in Vietnam. At any rate, one day after I'd left the PAO job

and became special assistant to the ambassador, Leonard Marx, my then boss, got on the telephone. The telephone in those days was of such quality you almost had to shout loud enough to be heard without the phone. But he said, "I've got an embassy for you, Barry." I said, "Oh good, what?" He said, "Niger." With what little I knew about Africa I said, "You mean Nigeria, don't you?" He said, "No, Niger." I said, "What a minute." I raced upstairs and looked in the library for an atlas. I got the map of Africa and there I saw Niger with big print going through it saying Sahara Desert. I said, "Leonard, I'll have to let you know." I called Margaret in the Philippines and said, "You don't want to go to Niger, do you?" She said, "Not after India and Vietnam." So we turned down the offer. I later find out Niger was Dean Rusk's or someone in the State's ultimate revenge for what they regarded as too much openness to the media. It was one of the few, if not the only country in the world, without a single daily newspaper. Nothing else was available. Meanwhile Jim Linen, president of Time, Inc. Was making a trip around the world. He and I were supposed to have lunch in Saigon. Unbeknownst to me, he and Andrew Heiskell, the other top people at Time, Inc. had been considering making me an offer. They had decided that Time, Inc. was much too insular, much too Ivy League-ish and they wanted to go outside and get some positive diversification. Jim and I were scheduled to have lunch. Unfortunately just about that same time we had had a visit by Vice President Humphrey and the wives had been called over. But a luncheon was scheduled with Humphrey for all mission council members so I was preempted and had to turn down the luncheon with Jim but suggested instead he have lunch with Margaret. Well, Jim was a two martini lunch man. He had lunch with Margaret and then to his dying day he remembered it as a lunch with me.

RV: (Laughs) Why, because of the two martinis?

BZ: (Laughs) Well, I think so. But in any event after he got back to the States he wrote me a note saying, "When you're good and ready to leave let us know. We may be interested in making you an offer." Word did get back to him. *Life* magazine did a profile on me. He got the *Life* bureau and the *Time* bureau in Saigon to give them a confidential spell-out on who I was, what I did, how well, et cetera. They did do a story on me, George Hunt, who later became a great friend, managing editor, former Marine, managing editor of *Life*, but having heard about my leaving because it did get in the

papers, I got a letter from Jim offering me a job. No explicit title, senior executive at Time, Inc. I didn't know whether it was on the editorial side or the business side. The salary was almost 50 percent more than my government salary and obviously given the outlook in my Foreign Service career with the very best at stake after turning down Niger a year as a diplomatic resident where presumably I would write a book about my experiences, which also, while it was fine, didn't really excite me. I wrote back and said, "I'll let you know when we get to the States." When we did get to the States after talks with my bosses, Leonard and others, I accepted the job from Time, Inc. but delayed it a little bit for a couple of months because legislation was going through Congress that made USIA people career Foreign Service and wrapped you into their retirement and all that kind of thing. So as I said I was assigned simply as the special assistant to the director of USIA between August and October when I finally left the government. The only thing I did of note in that period, obviously I did a certain amount of debriefing, but the National Press Club asked me to give a talk. I worked on that quite awhile and again in the papers you'll find a copy of that talk to the NPR (National Public Radio), which when I read it it's still in my mind valid as a judgment, saying we both failed in communicating the Vietnam War. The U.S. government had it's drawbacks but I have to tell you as a friend of the media and not as a spokesman for the government, the media also failed in many ways. In October of—I left the government, moved to New York. We eventually settled down in a place called Lincoln Towers, which Metropolitan Life Insurance Company filled and ended up ultimately quite a while later in an apartment in Central Park West but joined Time, Inc. as senior executive with no real assignment initially. They asked me to do some analysis of Time in the video business. I went back to the March of Dimes and various other activities they had undertaken. They had a shortcoming and I don't mean to get into the personnel decisions at the time with Time-Life Broadcast. Finally I was assigned not to the editorial side but to the business side and assigned as executive vice-president of Time-Life Broadcast. During that period initially, Time-Life Broadcast had five TV stations: Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Denver, San Diego, and a small UHF (Ultra High Frequency) station in Bakersfield, California. Pretty good markets. Bakersfield was small of course but we also had investments overseas in television—Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Hong Kong, even Australia.

Eventually we sold all of them. In that period when I was with Time, Inc. but not assigned yet and before the November election I had made—I have developed because of Vietnam some contacts in the Humphrey campaign. That was that '68 campaign of Hubert Humphrey versus Richard Nixon and was asked to come up with recommendations on what position he should take in Vietnam. He obviously was in a tough position. He wanted to separate himself from LBJ's commitment to, "stay the course," if I may quote someone, and yet couldn't criticize LBJ or get too far away from him. I came up with some papers about suggesting not a denial of LBJ's Vietnam policies but a gradual modification and withdrawal, a turning over the efforts of the Vietnamization that was then going on. George Ball, who had become his advisor and was critical of our efforts in Vietnam was an advisor to Humphrey but urged Humphrey, I was told later by what was his name John [Hoving]—I'll think of it—that he couldn't get that far away from LBJ. LBJ would cut his throat if he came off that critical of him. So he talked Humphrey out of the full acceptance of those recommendations. Humphrey then gave that very noted speech in Salt Lake City, standing up rather than seated, and talking about the Vietnam War, in which he recommended certain steps of modification withdrawals. I've always been convinced that if he had gone all the way he would have gotten those additional hundred thousand votes by which he lost the election to Nixon. He didn't of course. Nixon took over. While I maintained ties in Washington, gave a lot of speeches and briefings around the country at military bases about military relations with the media and so on, I turned basically to my work at Time, Inc. In the spring Jim Linen had a heart attack and by early summer of '69 he had to give up his active—Jim was the first among equals, the poor people who were running Time, Inc. after Harry Luce's death. He had to give up the presidency and become chairman of the executive committee or something. Andrew Heiskell took over. There was a whole recasting of the senior members of the executives at Time, Inc. I was made president of Time-Life Broadcast. My predecessor retired and a vice-president of Time, Inc. and then began from '69 until '75 six years of activity in various forms on the telecommunications area of Time, Inc. One major thing was at that time Time, Inc.'s total revenues were about six hundred and fifty million dollars. These days it's in the billions. *Life* magazine had all kinds of problems. The company had to borrow twenty-five million dollars to meet some

of its finances. This was shocking to a Time, Inc. that wasn't used to having deficits or debts so the decision was make to sell our television stations which had never been part of the substance side of Time, Inc. or largely a revenue-producing operation. Eventually we sold those television stations for what was then the McGraw-Hill, the largest TV sale of the period. If I remember the figure correctly, seventy million dollars was the price tag. A few years later after Carter and inflation and so on, the San Diego station itself was back in the two hundred million. But those were big doings at Time, Inc. and we were shifting gears into cable, particularly into Manhattan cable with a partner, a one-man partner that we got into and an involved series of developments named Charles Dolan, with whom we were partners. Time had fifty and eventually I was chairman of what became Home Box Office of Sterling Manhattan Cable, one of our subsidiaries. Dolan was our operating executive. We finally split up after starting the forerunner of Home Box Office. Charlie Dolan, Chuck Dolan was given credit for starting. He didn't really start with them; he started something called Sterling Sports Network. Home Box Office started the title with a couple of young staff members in my office who came up with that name, very bright young people. Dolan we finally forced out of the company. He left and we sold to him for a nominal amount, something like thirty-five thousand dollars, I've forgotten the exact figure, our claims to cable franchises in Long Island. Charlie took that. Charlie was a genius; Chuck Dolan was a genius in making money as an entrepreneur in this field. He took those questionable franchises in Long Island and developed ultimately Cablevision, which was valued the other day at something like seven billion dollars. The Dolans are one of the cable families who became billionaires. I was in on those early days of cable after we sold the TV stations in '72. I was then president and we changed the name from Time-Life Broadcast to Time-Life Cable. I was very active in the cable community. We were trying to get franchises and did so successfully in a number of cities. I got active in cable industry organizations, National Cable Television Association, developing Time, Inc.'s investment in the cable industry. Time, Inc. was hesitant. Roy Larson, who had been Harry Luce's business arm and was if anything the proprietor of *Time* magazine, did not like investment in hardware. Time, Inc. for instance never owned a printing press. It always contracted out the actual publication, the printing of its publication, and they were very concerned because cable is

a business where you have to put a lot of your capital, a lot of your money into hardware, into literally the cable. They were very concerned about that so they eventually got out of the cable business for the time being, came back into it later after I'd left, but by seventy-five there wasn't much business left there except what became Home Box Office and a few cable franchises. I'm not the best businessman in the world. My management style is more of a one-man supervision and so on, getting into a lot of detail and so on. It did not fit the Time, Inc. style too well. Not that I had any break or run-ins or anything but Jim Shepley, who by then had become president of Time, Inc. in place of Jim Linen, thought I'd be much better off in a staff-type position than in a line position. The Washington vice president, Larry Layburne, was retiring. He's a fine, fine guy. I had been doing an awful lot of Washington lobbying, contacting the cable industry, and the communications deal, and with my previous government experience decided I ought to really be transferred to Washington, become vice president for Washington affairs. In January 1, 1975 I moved to Washington, spent a year commuting while Margaret stayed in New York in our apartment in New York, but became vice president for Time, Inc. in Washington where I had five very active years in its simplest form of lobbying representing Time, Inc. Our interests were considerable on the level of postal rates, telecommunications, obviously any law affecting the media in many ways. Margaret and I became very active in all the social activities surrounding the government. We got constant streams of visitors from the executives in New York. My offices were at one corner of the Time, Inc. offices down here. A friend, the former assistant managing editor of Life, Bob Ajemian, was bureau chief. One of Andrew Heiskell's favorite lines when he got questions about diversification and minorities was, "I don't know how we're doing in the rest of the groups but we've got the Armenians covered from A to Z." But in any event we had three main areas, one the telecommunications area. Time, Inc. by then had acquired to add to its own company Temple Inland, a forest products company in Texas and combined it with its own forest land down there which they bought as a source of soft pine, East Texas, and the third area was the postal area that we lobbied. I was doing pretty well at that but nevertheless ran into a lot of opposition to various judgments and approaches on the part of Shepley and a couple of others in New York. As I was approaching sixty in 1980 both sort of with the agreement concurrent with the

encouragement of Shepley the president, I decided to retire from Time, Inc. I was then sixty years old. It was a friendly enough retirement but yet there's no doubt I'd been forced out. The old Time, Inc. hands—Time, Inc. was a very closed, insular corporation. Never could accept at that time—since changed—an outsider outside their normal, what shall I say, universe, an outsider coming in and becoming a vice-president that quickly and with that kind of authority. So I retired in 1980. Part of the condition of my retirement was that I couldn't take a job in a competitive field. A job opened up here in economic development for something that was then a fairly new concept but getting a lot of support, a Baltimore-Washington regional economic zone, and I became president of the Baltimore-Washington Regional Association or the Washington-Baltimore Regional Association, depending on which city you lived in. The concept was the two cities and the areas surrounding them was one big economic zone that should draw together, attract investment, expand businesses and become a major area. We went from northern Virginia to north of Baltimore eastward to the Chesapeake Bay. It never worked out. The culture of the two cities was quite different. Baltimore's business community was one type. Furthermore it was getting into hired executives, not Baltimore native executives. DC had much more of an inbred DC focus and government related business communities. While we made some progress it was not a marriage conceived in heaven. I was in that job for about two years, muddling success I would say. The association has long since fallen apart. And I went from that job to becoming what everyone is in Washington. Everyone who is unemployed is a consultant. I joined a couple of firms. I joined Bob Gray who had been very close to the Reagan White House. In fact, I was one of the vice chairmen in the Reagan inauguration in 1980. Gray started his own company, was very successful. He was, however, quiet controversial. Reports were that he was gay and he probably was. That didn't affect my relations with him but I got—after I'd been out of it for many, many years I got involved in some Armenian activities. An organization called the Armenian Assembly asked me to join their board of directors. It was a lobbying representation organization here in Washington. Meanwhile Gray had gotten Turkey as a client and some Turkish newspaper picked up that the Turkish embassy's representatives in Washington include an activist Armenian as the senior vice president. What the heck's going on? The Turkish ambassador protested to Gray, said,

"I'm under the gun from our parliament. You've got to do something. I can't keep this contract going." Gray called me in, I made a statement to the press that what I did I did on my own. I had nothing to do with the Turkish account. What I do on my own time is my own business as long as it's not illegal. Bob asked me to resign. I refused to do so. So he fired me and after that two years with Gray and Company I was out on my own again. No payoff. I took the case to the Human Rights Commission in DC. They didn't understand the issue. They dealt mostly with black-white issues. Through friends I contacted various Washington lobbying PR accounts, joined hands with a fellow named Hector Alcalde, who was the new contact of mine but through mutual friends. I joined Alcalde and Fay in 1983 or 4 and I've been on paper—it's a corporation run by Hector and his current partner Kevin Fay but for marketing we called each other partners and I've been with Alcalde and Fay for the last twenty years now. More than twenty, twenty-two years, off and on representing some foreign country. I represented the sultan of Oman, largely in the area of media relations. Oman, I've done assignments for Lebanon, for Cypress, for Thailand, informally without compensation for my assistance with the Republic of Armenia, currently representing political parties in Bangladesh, doing some telecommunications, although I've not withdrawn deliberately but my accounts in those areas have ended, doing a certain amount of writing, doing a certain amount of pro bono work in various things with Marines and with—I'm looking at my list here—with the Armenian embassy as I said, joining some boards. I had been on some boards. I'm currently on the International Research and Exchanges Board, president of something called the Public Diplomacy Council, et cetera, and that's what I'm doing now. And now I'm finally eighty-six years old.

RV: Why do you keep working at this age? What drives you?

BZ: What drives me is the desire to be active. I know very few people who are truly retired, do nothing, and are happy about it. The worst thought I have in the world is get up in the morning and have nothing to do except personal stuff. I'm interested. As long I can do it, as long as someone is offering me an office with the facilities and occasional plant and income, why not? I have no desire to give it all up and retire. You get tired at times but then you say, "The hell with it." But nevertheless by and large it's what keeps you going, what keeps me going I think.

RV: Okay. Well, Barry, let's go ahead and stop the session for today.

BZ: Right.

Interview with Barry Zorthian
Session 11 of 11
November 8, 2006

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Today is November 8, 2006. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, and Barry is in Washington again and it's about 9:15 AM Central Standard Time. Barry, winding up this interview I really wanted to talk about some of these larger issues dealing with the Vietnam War and to get your opinion on them and to have you reflect back in time and see this as you maybe saw these items then and how you see these items today. One of them is—we've talked a lot about the media coverage but can you make some comments on the uniqueness of the media coverage and the Vietnam War?

Barry Zorthian: Well, right from the start the Vietnam War was probably in terms of media coverage the least restrictive war, restrictions on the media in war time, that we've experienced, certainly that we've experienced in my lifetime. Maybe if you go back to the Civil War or something it might be different. The media was able to travel, able to talk, travel very often by courtesy of the government and government facilities—planes, diesels, and so on—able to talk and able to transmit without pre-censorship. This was reviewed at times, censorship was proposed. I always opposed censorship. I didn't think it was either right or practical in the Vietnam circumstance. All of that having been said, the inevitable result of that, obviously depending on the caliber and competence of the correspondents—remember while Vietnam was called the first television war it also primarily was dominated by print coverage from the mainstream media. All that happened and instead the coverage, in my mind at least, was uneven. By that I don't mean it was critical and therefore uneven but that the qualities, the understanding of the war, the nature of it, the issues involved, the factors involved and so-on, were set by a handful and were just not realized sufficiently by almost all of the media representatives. Now there were some very good ones, people like Bob Shaplen, covering the political side for the *New Yorker*, guys like Frank McCullough covering the combat, the war itself for *Time* magazine. There were the reporters covering the day to day events, the spot news coverage. AP was good, Mal Brown was good, Peter Arnett was extremely critical but he certainly covered combat. Neil Sheehan, David Hallbertstan, you remember while

David visited Vietnam in the middle years he left Vietnam as a resident correspondent fairly early in the game, about ’63/’64 and then came back. So the coverage varied. I think the quality of the coverage varied depending on the competence of the individual journalist. The really competent ones were limited in number. There was a great deal of herd instinct report. People including some prominent national journalists coming out there for a week and having all kinds of conclusions based largely on their interface with the other correspondents, the long-time resident correspondents in many, many cases. Very few came and took the time to probe directly into the elements among the Vietnamese. Very few of them had qualified judgments. So I say, like everything else in Vietnam, the media was a mixed stack. Now the media will in a self-serving end, claim that coverage was accurate and really reflected the war more than the official reports on it. I think you can make a case the other way.

RV: Okay. Barry, in wars since Vietnam do you think this style of reporting would have worked for the United States or was it better that Vietnam was kind of the last kind of open media war, if you will?

BZ: I think censorship as a practical thing put aside for the moment the merits and validity of censorship, I think censorship is impractical in today’s world where communication is so prevalent, so consuming, so available. There can’t be censorship. I would note also that in terms of the United States the only censorship that has been accepted, and this goes back even to World War I, has been protection of information that affects, would jeopardize the lives of the troops or the execution of an operation, the time of attacks, the initiation of an operation. We have never had censorship of the broad nature of the conflict, the justification for it, the overall execution of the operation, so I don’t think formal censorship is in the interest or in the capacity of the United States. Now, insofar as tactical information goes the type of information that as I say, jeopardizes or would jeopardize the outcome of an operation or the lives of the troops involved, we had self-censorship and self-acceptance of that by the media in Vietnam. We had a set of ten ground rules, very basic things. Who was in what units or operation, what time it would get underway, et cetera, et cetera, and the media on a voluntary basis were very conscientious about observing those. Four and a half years I was there. I think we had—the exact number I’m not sure but not more than six and probably less and some

of those violations were inadvertent. I've said before in these notes, the only deliberate violation of those rules I remember was by Jack Forsie of the *Los Angeles Times* and he admitted it later. We lifted his credentials for a month. He admitted later that he had tested it and it was wrong to test it, that he made a mistake. However, having said censorship is impractical and the nature of what is practical, I don't think in any future we will have as open a situation as Vietnam. The instincts of governments today is to restrain the projection of information without some prior review, whether it would be harsh censorship or very rigid or not. One reason is that in most cases, certainly the case in Vietnam, there was no freedom of coverage, no freedom of the media if you will, on the other side of the lines. You had a couple of correspondents, well selected communists-aligned correspondents, covering the VC and the North Vietnamese at times during that war, but certainly not hundreds the way it was in Saigon. Today Iraq does have some coverage from "the other side" and it had some in the first Gulf War, Peter Arnett and Bernie Shaw staying behind after the Iraqis invaded Kuwait. But it's not expensive and it's not with the freedom of movement and access to the participants that has been the case on the part of the United States and in this present situation the rest of the coalition. So I'm not sure—I'm quite sure you're never going to get as free a situation, setting as we had in Vietnam.

RV: Okay. What affect did then the anti-war movement have upon not just the media coverage but the war in general? I know it's a large question but how far is this argument to take us about the anti-war movement changing the tone of the war?

BZ: Richard, remember I'm talking and my comments apply basically to the four and a half years I was there.

RV: Absolutely.

BZ: I say that not in terms of my personal involvement but the nature of the war, the attitude towards it, the viewpoint of the American public, changed considerably after Tet. I left a few months after Tet. The war, the attitude towards it, I think was significantly different and media, government media, military relations deteriorated through the last half—well, from Tet on through '68 and '69 through '72. The military deteriorated. That's when we had that Charlie company television show and the fragging of officers and all that sort of thing. Now part of that change was the impact of Tet and

the follow-up battles, not only on the battlefields which I think historians as well as even then observers believed was a "victory" but there's certainly an impact on American public opinion and resistance to the war, even violent resistance to the war grew tremendously. It led to President Johnson withdrawing from running again, led to all the demonstrations, the famous surrounding of the Pentagon and so on. All that was a result of exposure to what was happening in Vietnam and Tet and so on and that exposure to the American public was a result of media coverage. How else did the public see it? So when you say, "How did media coverage affect American public thinking?" And I don't say that coverage was inaccurate, but it did affect American thinking by exposing war to the public generally. Television grew in size and timeliness and coverage, and the American public saw it constantly and reacted to it in a negative way. We see some of that in the Iraq War today, television coverage, media coverage affecting the reaction, the evaluation by the public and creating opposition and criticism. I'm not sure you can ever fight a war again with communications being what it is for very long, as far as the American public is concerned. Our attention span is relatively very short, to a great extent because of media coverage, and not necessarily inaccurate media coverage but simply expository media coverage. Here's what war is like. When you see it on screen—you know, we had it in World War II. You'd have Movietone News and so on and it had an affect but it wasn't today's footage. It came a week later and a movie theater was not the same thing as seeing television coverage in your living room.

RV: Well, you know, it's interesting, Barry. I want to ask you about comparing today's war and we're doing this interview in 2006 and we're fighting in Afghanistan—we being the United States—we're fighting in Afghanistan and in Iraq and just for example I am in touch with soldiers on the ground in Baghdad who are going on out on daily combat operations. I'm touch with them via email and that's very, very different from past wars, this instantaneous exchange of ideas and having a conversation with somebody in real time almost. Is this a problem or is this something that's inevitable in a democracy or in a technological age? How do you see this instantaneous communication, something different from what we had in Vietnam?

BZ: Well, we had a midway point in Vietnam. There was a telephone obviously in the field and you could get to that telephone and there was, if you will, next day

television. Footage would be flown to Tokyo or Los Angeles and then fed to the East Coast for transmission but you're absolutely right. And given the nature of war today where the bulk of your troops are not out in combat shooting at an enemy or patrolling and so on but are in either bases or compounds or camps or fortified buildings doing support operations, supplies and munitions supports, all the back of the store, back of the book services that are necessary in modern combat, it's almost like they're going to work in the morning and coming back in the evening and they can call and talk to their families, send email, be in constant touch. Not that that makes casualties any more acceptable but nevertheless the contact with the home front and therefore the impact on the home front communicated through those channels is considerably more than has been the case in the past and was in Vietnam and far, far more than in World War II. I was twenty-eight months overseas in World War II, a certain amount of it in combat. My communication with my family was by v-mail, letters incidentally that were censored. Someone on the battalion had to read all outgoing mail for any inadvertent release of classified information. Now today in that same situation I'd be on email every day with my wife and in many cases be able to pick up a telephone. So the difference is real and she would be much more sensitive and knowledgeable about what's going on in the field and how my unit is doing and how I'm doing personally.

RV: Okay. Speaking of censorship and media coverage of the war, one incident that really came to light after you had left was the My Lai incident and what did you think about the coverage of that and the exposure that that got?

BZ: My Lai took place while I was there.

RV: Right, but it was exposed later.

BZ: It was exposed later by Seymour Hirsh and it was a horrible incident, in its way as bad as Abu Ghraib in Iraq, maybe even worse because there was later what was decided as deliberate and conscious slaughter of civilians. The fact that the system didn't produce word of that through the established channels of reporting from the front lines, obviously exposed a serious flaw and the blame on it I guess was covered up by officers in the line of command. It was a price that cost a number of both junior and more senior officers, including Sam Koster, or whatever the two-star general in charge, their careers. Is there any justification for that kind of thing? Not really. From the front-line soldier's

viewpoint the rationale that led to it was incidents and concern on the ground and the very nature of the opposition where civilians were involved in combat support, where even the opposing soldiers if you will were hard to identify. This was an insurgent army, guerilla warfare, dressed in pajamas or sandals or what have you. If that all builds up in the front-line soldier's mind and approach and something that seems suspicious leads at time to overreaction, what can you do about that? Train, train, train. They seem to be trying to train in Iraq on the patrols they undertake. By then a lot of our military—remember we had the draft then—probably, and I don't say this as a conclusion but with looking at it, had not received sufficient training to respond in all cases responsibly to any perceived threats and the lack of that kind of training I think is what led to things like My Lai. Now, you'll get a statement that horrible things happen in all wars and they do, probably for the same reasons: lack of training, lack of experience, overreaction by less than prepared troops.

RV: Well as the United States transitioned out of Vietnam, Barry, how did you view what was happening in Paris, the peace conference, which started initially in '68 but then concluded with the signing in '73? What did you think of that whole thing and then the actual agreement?

BZ: Well, I've been quoted in papers, Bob Herbert picked it up out of a interview I said for a book that the deal we ended up with in '72 we could probably have gotten in '69 but at the time I left Vietnam after Tet—when I left Vietnam, and I haven't gotten the exact figures at my fingertips we had twenty-eight thousand or so death casualties. Three years later when we finally made the deal to pull out we had fifty-eight thousand roughly. I have never been convinced those thirty thousand, twenty-five or thirty thousand casualties of those three years were justified. If we were going to get out as we did we should have done it in '69 and could we have done it politically? The answer is I think yes because remember Nixon was elected in part at least on, "I've got a plan to get out of Vietnam."

RV: That's right.

BZ: Now as for the final deal I'm very disturbed by it, very critical of it. In my mind we sold out an awful lot of Vietnamese who had literally put their lives on the line to work with us. Essentially we agreed to turn over—we knew it was going to happen.

We agreed to turn over South Vietnam to the North in return for our POWs. That was the essence of the agreement. It took three years for it to happen, we stopped aiding—you remember President Ford put in an appeal for seven hundred million dollars in assistance to the Vietnamese which Congress turned down and all that sort of thing but I was very disappointed at the final, final deal. Could we have "won" whatever winning in Vietnam meant? There are those who would argue, as some recent studies have done but even earlier, if you ever read Bill Colby's book on the Vietnam War that we had the situation well in hand by '72 when we gave up. Bill's thesis is disputed but nevertheless there were some very qualified people who thought "we were on top of Vietnam" when we gave up.

RV: How bothered are you, Barry, about the outcome of that war? Looking back today personally, how do you feel about it?

BZ: I am very embarrassed and disappointed by that famous picture of Americans leaving from the top of the buildings and climbing into a helicopter, that sort of departure from Saigon picture. I am very disturbed still, whatever it is, thirty-five years later, by the way we left Vietnam and how we left many, many Vietnamese in the lurch who had been very committed, who had worked—the Vietnamese did not have their own government that was worthy of a lot of the people. I guess I'm not bitter but very disappointed by the conclusion in Vietnam and I don't think the conventional wisdom that Vietnam was a great, great mistake or failure on the part of the American government and part of America is entirely valid. I think the ultimate evaluation will be shown to be a lot grayer, not black and white, and I hope more on the white side for its ultimate impact in the region and our national interest will be better in the long run than it is today.

RV: So I take it that you do not think we achieved peace with honor as Nixon and Kissinger would think.

BZ: Far from it, far from it. And I've always been very critical of Kissinger and Nixon for the result. Now their answer is probably, "You couldn't maintain our staying their politically. U.S. public opinion had turned against it." We had all kinds of problems. We went through a period. We were going through an enormous social change in the United States as a result of the Civil Rights movement in the late fifties and

early sixties. We had a draft under which students in college were exempt from military. It was almost a class structure. We were going through the assassination of Kennedy, LBJ's Great Society, the Cold War heating up, not too far from the Cuban thing. The world was in very tough times and very tough situations at that point. And our standing as a great nation and powerful carrying on in its interest and major operations was under challenge from our own public.

RV: I would like to ask you about the books and movies on Vietnam. Just off the top of your head let's start with some movies. Do you see movies; have you seen movies on the Vietnam War?

BZ: Oh sure.

RV: What do you think about them?

BZ: Oh, they vary obviously. You know the ones who received the most attention, *Apocalypse Now*, certainly overdone. What was the Oliver Stone movie?

RV: That was *Platoon*.

BZ: No, no, *Platoon* was another one.

RV: *Born on the Fourth of July*?

BZ: No, it was about hearts and minds. It was vastly overdone. It took a number of isolated incidents spread over a four year to six year period and crammed them in as though it all happened consecutively right away. It was the Oliver Stone movie and I'll think of it a half hour after I hang up.

RV: Is it *Heaven and Earth*?

BZ: No. This had—then came the HBO version of Neil Sheehan's book on John Paul Vann. And that I think I said earlier, it made a caricature of a lot of individuals, including certainly General Westmoreland, to a point where even Neil Sheehan was unhappy about it and David Halbertstam asked that his role, his name in it, be withdrawn. Now there are movies the other way, *The Green Berets* that goes back virtually to the John Wayne days, they're overdone in their own way. War is never that dramatic or one-sided. Movies on Vietnam have not been very good. There have been some good books probably. Even that James Webb we talked about, *Fields of Fire* and so on but I think if you can compare these things by and large the track record on the books and novels is better than movies. There have been nonfiction books on Vietnam, some of which were

good. The one that's gotten the most attention, *The History of Vietnam*, was fine for when it was done which was shortly after the war. I don't think the definitive history of Vietnam has been written yet and probably won't be for a while.

RV: What would it take to write it? Is it just simply time and declassification?

BZ: Time, perspective, a lot more evaluation of the available sources and materials, judgment by people without, by historians, by scholars without an initial bias, and some real sensitivity for the political atmosphere in which all this took place, the political atmosphere, not just in Vietnam but in the United States and even in the world. You know we worry about the standing and the reputation of the U.S. currently as a result of the Iraq War and our policies. I would remind anyone that the United States was not very popular or the U.S. in the war in Vietnam was not very popular worldwide. Demonstrations of all kinds, governments critical even though we have these now. So these things come simply as unique perspective any final judgments, if they'll ever be a final judgment.

RV: Barry, looking back at your experience in Vietnam, how do you think it most affected you, both personally and professionally?

BZ: Well, on a personal side the separation except for their brief visits for three and a half years from my family and particularly in the case of our two sons who were still not even in their teens yet—Greg was twelve and came back to school for our final year and Steve was even younger—I think that was affected, me personally with my relations with my family. That was a price to pay that was significant. Much more professionally it certainly underlined for me the experience as part of my development and career in Foreign Service. It was significant. It was probably—even though the Voice of America thirteen years was longer and in some ways broader, nevertheless the experience in Vietnam, the importance of communication, the importance of honesty, accuracy for the government with its people in such a major operation of the government, a major undertaking that affected the life of the country. The importance of that and the need for transparency and accuracy and consistency between what Washington was saying and the facts on the ground and all that is probably part of the greatest impact on me.

RV: Okay. Your career really did take off in a different direction with you left Vietnam and then you went into kind of a different track. I was wondering if you ever got back to Vietnam and if you have not, would you ever want to go back?

BZ: We went back. My wife and I went back in 1995 purely as tourists. We made a point of not getting in contact with any of the people with whom I had been associated who were still there. It was a trip of nostalgia. Remember when we lived there and went to this delta town, et cetera, et cetera? Yes, I want to go back. A very intense part of my life took place there and it's worth visiting but I have no desire for instance to go to Hanoi in North Vietnam. I probably could but where we had shed so much sweat and tears in the South was important to revisit.

RV: Why not Hanoi?

BZ: I had no desire for it. I had no memory of Hanoi. I had no exposure to it and really wasn't very interested in seeing what it was like. People kept saying, "You should go," but I didn't want to, and there was nothing hostile about the North Vietnamese. It was not part of my life as Saigon and the South was.

RV: Sure. How did you find Saigon in '95?

BZ: Very much alive, building going on. I'm told that it's changed even from then but Vietnamese by then, even in '95, twenty years after the war, the population because of the demographics, the percentage of youth—they had very limited memories and knowledge of the war. The people were perfectly friendly. Saigon, the southern Vietnamese were very much alive, developing. We drove down to the delta. Can Tho had changed and grown. It was a very vibrant country despite the "communist" government. The communist government certainly wasn't traditional communism like the Chinese that were adapting economic appearance of practices and loss that were, if you will, market oriented and they were coming along. Again, they'd improved tremendously to the point where we worked out a trade agreement with them. The president is going to visit there in the spring. Vietnam is coming along well. I've always greatly admired the Vietnamese people. They work hard, are intelligent, very, very easy to live with.

RV: If you walked into a classroom today, Barry, what would you tell young people about the Vietnam War and about Vietnam?

BZ: I did a talk, which you'll find in the papers, in the Mercersburg Academy a few years ago and I would tell them obviously depending on the age and how much time and energy they were ready to put into it, but I would tell them don't take the current—this was a number of years ago—conventional judgments on Vietnam at face value. Probe and ask and look into it because much of what is being claimed is questionable and recognize that all that is being distilled for your attention may be inaccurate to a certain extent. That's certainly—there are very few real blacks and whites in Vietnam. It was mostly grays and that should be borne in mind.

RV: What do you think about the Vietnam War Memorial there in Washington?

BZ: I think it's great. I'm an endorser of it, been to it, visited it a number of times. It's an effective color system. And older but notable and far greater critics than I am have praised it. There's also been critics, as you know. It's too stark and should be balanced like more traditional memorials so they put up that statue of two or three figures in uniform, including a woman, but the original memorial in itself I think is a tremendous thing.

RV: Let me ask you about doing this interview, Barry. What has it been like for you to go back and talk in detail about the Vietnam experience as you had it?

BZ: Well, obviously it stirred up a lot of thoughts that have been put away. I wish I were more articulate offhand. A lot of your questions this morning, my responses would hopefully be a little more polished with reflection and effort. It hasn't come out as smoothly has I would have liked but it's also been a very useful and very valuable exercise for me in refreshing my thoughts on some of these subjects and sort of leads me to say, "Damn it, I should go and write that book I've been talking about for thirty-five years."

RV: (Laughs) Right. Well, is there anything else that you would like to comment upon or talk about that we have not covered in the interview?

BZ: Not really. You know as I'm driving along somewhere something will come to mind and I'll drop you a note. At the moment, no. I thank you for your patience putting up with my failure to speak better. But no, this has been a good exercise from my view.

RV: Well, I'm glad to hear that and I really appreciate your time and effort that you put into this. So we'll go ahead and end the interview now with Mr. Barry Zorthian. Thank you very much, Barry.