

INTERVIEW II

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INTERVIEWEE: RUFUS PHILLIPS
INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger
PLACE: Mr. Phillips' office, Arlington, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

G: What were you doing in Laos?

P: I was asked to go up there and start something that was called Civic Action. The Lao government under Souvanna Phouma was facing a problem in that they had concluded some accords with the Pathet Lao whereby the Pathet Lao were to be integrated into the government, there were to be elections. It was evident to the Lao themselves that they had really done nothing in the countryside in the way of village development, or anything that would justify any kind of popular support for the government, other than sort of residual loyalty to the king.

The basic idea was to try to duplicate some of the better elements of the experience in the Philippines and in Vietnam--the early experience--and see if civilian-military teams couldn't be recruited, trained, organized, and sent out to work in the villages, to help the villagers. This is basically what I did. I worked with a guy named Oudone Sananikone--O-U-D-O-N-E S-A-N-A-N-I-K-O-N-E--who was a lieutenant colonel in the army at the time, and who was a wonderful guy. We had some success with that program. But that mired down in all kinds of Lao politics and other problems.

I stayed there off and on for about two years. Then I left the government in 1959, went to work for my father in Airways Engineering. Then in 1962 I got a call from the director of AID, Far East, a guy named [Seymour] Janow, asking me whether I would come in and talk with them about helping them with something to do with Vietnam. I said, well, sure. So I went down to talk with them and they said, "We have a real problem with the AID mission out in Vietnam. It's all concentrated in the cities, it has nothing going in the countryside, it's making no contribution to the counterinsurgency effort"--as it was called then--"and we want to see what can be done to make AID a participant and provide some real support. Would you be willing to go out there and take a look at what needs to be done with the AID mission and how it might be reorganized, what programs might be undertaken?" I said, "Well, I'll have to check." I talked with my father, who wasn't very happy about it because, I suspect, he could see me getting involved again, and of course I had had a rather deep and kind of continuing commitment to the Vietnamese to help them. And by that time I had a wife and two small kids, and she thought that I ought to do what I wanted to do, at least to go out there and see what could be done and whether it could be reorganized. I got the agreement of AID to tap a guy that I had known briefly in Laos, named Bert Fraleigh, who was a very experienced general-development person who'd been on Taiwan and who had been largely responsible for the success of the veterans' program in Taiwan.

G: Was that part of AID?

P: That's a whole story in and of itself. It was AID-supported, but if you'll remember, the Gimo [Chiang Kai-shek] had literally thousands of veterans that had to be retired and had to be given something to do. The feeling at the time was that this was a hopeless situation, that these were basket cases. In fact, in about five years, just about every one of those people was gainfully employed doing something, and actually the largest construction firm on Taiwan and the one with the most overseas business right now is one called the Retired Serviceman's Engineering Agency, run by a fellow named Colonel Yin [?].

Anyway, I had known Bert because he came up to Laos on some rural development programs, and so I asked that he go with me. Together we formed a team. We went out there; we spent almost two months going all over the countryside, talking to various government ministries, going out and seeing what was actually happening in the countryside. And my report recommended a very radical overhaul of AID, with the creation of a new rural affairs division, but at the level of assistant to the director so that it took its authority directly from the director.

G: Who was the director of AID then?

P: A guy named Bill Phippen [?], who actually was the acting director. A guy named Gardner had been there, but he had come back. Bill was acting director and then--I'm trying to think of the fellow that came in who had been on Taiwan before; I'll think of his name in a minute--and he became the director.

Anyway, we came up with a new organization which would put representatives out in the provinces, working directly with the province chiefs. I had access to everybody in the Vietnamese government from

[Ngo Dinh] Diem on down. I saw Diem, I saw Nguyen Dinh Thuan, I saw everybody, and [Ngo Dinh] Nhu. I talked about a kind of a teamwork situation in which we would create a provincial coordinating committee composed of the province chief, the AID representative, and the military advisory group representative. They would be given a budget, including some contingency funds, for a variety of activities, which included everything ranging from hamlet self-help, to a school program, to emergency rebuilding of anything destroyed as a result of either Viet Cong or our own attacks, resettlement assistance for people who had to be or were resettled, assistance in training the hamlet militia.

The self-help program was a thing where we created a fund for each village, which they could use on a project that they wanted to build which they felt was most urgent for their hamlet or village. In order to qualify, you had to have an elected hamlet committee. Well, I presented all that to the Vietnamese and they were very enthusiastic about it. So this began to put some bones, so to speak, some flesh on the bones of what the Vietnamese had already started, which was the strategic hamlet program.

The program was sold to the Vietnamese; they asked me to come back; I gave a qualified answer. The same thing happened so far as the ambassador and the AID mission was concerned. They endorsed the report. We also came up with a lot of other programs, agricultural development programs, all kinds of stuff, everything you can imagine that could have some material impact in the countryside.

G: Would you describe this more as a reorganization, or were there more funds being funneled in?

P: Yes, there were more funds being funneled in. In fact, there was a special fund created of ten million dollars' worth of piasters, which was a U.S. fund which was turned over to the Vietnamese to get this whole thing rolling. In addition, we tapped some existing USAID programs; in other words, we took funds that were in USAID programs, say, in the school program [that] were going to higher education, we put it into rural schools.

G: How did you get around--the contingency fund would have presented some bookkeeping problems, wouldn't it?

P: It presented a hell of a big problem, but they cleared it back here. I presented it as a way of getting this thing started and of going around the problem that the Vietnamese government had of their own procedures, which were so clumsy and required pre-audit up at the national level before a province chief could do anything. You couldn't go out and buy a load of charcoal without getting bids from three people, sending it to Saigon, and getting it approved before you made the award.

G: Was this the French heritage?

P: I think some, yes. So the system was simply not functioning, and the province chiefs, the guys who really wanted to do something, they had to steal money to get the job done, and they were really upset about it. We got a good reception from the province chiefs. I mean, these ideas really were ones that I worked out and picked up from a lot of the people who were already working out in the field. In effect, in that way they reflected, I think, reality in terms of needs and also what people could effectively accomplish, and it addressed the problem of constipation in the Vietnamese system. It just wasn't functioning.

The other thing that we did was instead of trying to deliver things like cement and sheet roofing and fertilizer and surplus goods that we got from the U.S. Defense Department--God, we got unbelievable amounts of almost anything you can think of, from parachuting to all kinds of cloth, blankets, which we were able to buy very cheaply because they were surplus. There was a Vietnamese agency that was run by a very, very capable and honest guy who used to distribute private relief supplies, and what he did was he used all commercial trucks. He had a real system. So we took four guys--initially only two and eventually we had a staff of four--and they went over and worked with this guy. And I think the records will show that in a year and a half we moved more stuff out to the countryside than AID ever succeeded in moving afterwards through their own channels, even when they had about five thousand people out there.

G: To what do you attribute that?

P: Well, I attribute it to a lack of bureaucracy, frankly.

G: (Laughter) Okay.

P: And also some ingenious use of a system in place. Sure, some of the private truckers in certain areas had to pay something to the VC, but they got the goods there.

We had four regional coordinators. The staff was almost entirely out in the countryside. I guess we had eventually about fifty guys, including those four coordinators out in the countryside, and we had about twelve in Saigon. And that's the way the thing was run, it was run very lean. The four coordinators were eventually replaced by four

missions of five hundred to eight hundred at the regional level, but that's another story.

(Laughter)

G: That's a terrible commentary.

P: Anyhow, on the way back, I was flown to Honolulu to participate in one of [Robert] McNamara's big flying circuses. This was August, I think.

G: Of 1962?

P: 1962, yes. And I was asked to give a brief presentation of what we were doing, and he thought that was great. He'd never heard of hamlet elections, though, and so he thought that was good.

G: The hamlet chiefs were still appointed, were they not?

P: They had been, but the Vietnamese actually--you know, one of the things I found out when I got out there is that as usual, nobody had read any of the stuff that the Vietnamese were putting out themselves on what they wanted to achieve with the strategic hamlet program. Well, one of the things they had in there was the idea that the hamlet chiefs ought to be elected. So I just picked up on that. That's kind of typical, that is that we come into a country and we don't know what they're doing, so we dream up a lot of ideas of our own. I tried to take the ideas that they had and build on them so that it was more their idea than our idea. And I think that we got around the sovereignty issue because--well, I think they trusted us, and particularly because I had been there with Ed [Lansdale] before, they trusted me, that I was trying to get something done that was really in their best interests.

G: You'll pardon me for saying that really sounds like an engineer's approach to a problem.

P: An engineer's approach?

G: Yes.

P: No, I don't think it's an engineer's approach. I don't know how to characterize it. I'd say, in a way, it was a highly political approach, because it appreciated Vietnamese sensibilities and capabilities.

G: Yes. Well, that may be the most political way of all to approach it.

P: Anyway, I came back and I got called over to the White House to talk to Mike Forrestal, and everybody wanted me to go out and run the program.

G: This would have been fall, 1962?

P: Yes. Well, it was the end of August. Let's see, June, July--it was around the middle of August, yes, about the middle of August.

Well, I had kind of gotten myself in a position, I guess, where I couldn't really refuse. I mean, here I had created this program, I sold it to everybody--

G: Did you want to refuse?

P: --and everybody wanted me to go back out there. Well, I had mixed emotions about it, but I was excited about the possibilities. I could see what could be done. I had some reservations about the political situation vis-a-vis Diem.

G: What was that all about?

P: I had a lot of friends who were close to him, and who were disturbed because they felt that Nhu had effectively cut him off from a lot of his support and alienated a lot of people; that the political base of the government wasn't as broad or as solid as it ought to be and it was vulnerable, [and] that the President was too isolated, and that also there were some scandals. The monetary system was being milked by a guy

who was one of Nhu's protégés, and this sort of stuff was not reflecting well on Diem. And he was oblivious to a lot of it.

I got some whiffs of this and frankly went back on a gamble that somehow maybe the political situation would improve, or if not, maybe we could get Ed out there, who was the only guy who really had any influence with Diem in the right sense of the word. In other words, he was, I think, the only American that Diem would either listen to or really pour his heart out to or talk to.

G: He had made a trip in 1961, I think, Lansdale had, hadn't he, for Kennedy?

P: He made a trip earlier and then he went out in 1961, yes. He had quite an argument about what ought to be done out there, because he did not agree with the Taylor-Staley [Taylor-Rostow?] mission approach, which was pretty conventional: build up the conventional army. That was another thing that I found, you know, I didn't have time to dig into it too deeply, but I found pretty disturbing, and that was that the army was organized into corps and divisions, and they really were not very well geared to fighting the kind of war that was under way. And they didn't have the connection between the province chief and the forces in the province, and the regular army forces at division and corps were not at all good. There was a lot of poor intelligence, and some blind shelling and bombing going on, which was counterproductive. You could get a feel for some of that, but it was only when I went back and really got into it that I got the full impact of it.

G: What about the local forces, the self-defense force and so forth?

P: In many areas they were good, but the problem was that you couldn't get very much coordination with the regular Vietnamese army forces, so that if the VC moved in some regular forces of their own at a weak point to overwhelm the locals, the Vietnamese army was nowhere to be found. It wasn't just that they were ducking combat. The whole thing was much too hierarchical and too stratified, and I think that basically the military mission--the guys that were working handling the provincial advisers, they understood the problem. But the guys in MACV were even then, I think, leaning to a very conventional point of view of the war.

G: There was a common complaint, I think, heard, that the VC would knock off a local force post and then ambush the relieving force, and apparently this happened over and over and over.

P: Yes, that's true, but had the army been organized differently, as it was when we first got into Vietnam in 1954-55, had it been organized as a territorial force rather than in regiments, divisions, et cetera, which was frankly a useless kind of an organization for this sort of war--not only useless but counterproductive, because you could organize regimental and division sweeps and find nothing, and there was a lot of that going on.

Anyway, those were some of my worrisome kinds of impressions, but I thought that, well, if we could really get a development program going here, something that's really exciting that gets people motivated and stirred up, maybe we can salvage this thing.

So I came back and I agreed to go back out, and I started recruiting people immediately. A lot of these guys were young guys who I knew of. I got very few AID old hands. I got some. Two guys I'd known up

in Laos, who [had] worked for Tom Dooley. A third guy had been up there working in the army as part of a psywar company--

G: Can I get these names from you later?

P: Yes, sure. Bob Burns [?] is the guy who was the psywar guy. He's an interesting guy to talk to. He's out in California.

I got John O'Donnell, who had also been briefly in the army, was part Hawaiian, a very young guy but was very interested in this kind of work. Bert Fraleigh turned up a couple of old friends of his. One guy who asked me almost the day after I arrived--he came over to USAID and volunteered--was a guy named Dave Hudson, who was a stringer for NBC. I never will forget this. Dave stopped me on the steps at USAID and asked me where could he find Rufus Phillips. I said, "You've found him." He said, "I'm Dave Hudson and I want to volunteer to work for you." I said, "That's great. What are you doing now?" He said, "I'm a stringer for NBC. I've heard about what you're doing." I said, "Well, sounds fine to me, any guy that's that motivated. Where do you want to go?" He said, "Give me the toughest province you got." And I said, "You're going to Ca Mau." And that's where he went, he went down to Ca Mau. He was our chief liaison with Father Hoa down there.

G: The Sea Swallows.

P: Yes. Anyhow, I just gave you a little bit of that to give you some flavor of how this group was made up. They were made up of very highly motivated people. We got twelve young guys from IVS, from the International Volunteer Service, who had already been in Vietnam, who were working strictly on agricultural projects. A couple of those guys, who were only about twenty-two or twenty-three, were the best people we had.

I put them out there; they were working with colonels and majors, and I gave them all the responsibility. I said, "Here's your job." We wrote up a manual for them, to give them some idea of what the sort of philosophical framework was and what we were going to try to achieve, what kind of programs we were going to be carrying out, and we just let them loose. Many of them did splendidly, I mean, they really were extraordinary. John O'Donnell we put down with the touchiest province chief that we had to work with but who was also the best, who was Colonel [Tran Ngoc] Chau, the guy that got thrown in jail by [Nguyen Van] Thieu, and then when the Viet Cong came in--supposedly because he had a Viet Cong brother; he did have a Viet Cong brother--

G: Pham Ngoc Thao?

P: Pham Ngoc Thao, yes.

G: The one I'm thinking of had been province chief, I think, of Long An.

P: No, of Kien Hoa.

One of our first sessions--I started working with a Colonel Hoang Van Loc who was acting as the chief of staff for the strategic hamlet program. We decided that what we'd do was call in the province chiefs, talk to them about their program and develop the program with them. So we called in Chau, one of the first guys we talked to, because he said, "This guy's really good." Chau came in, and Chau immediately launched into a speech about how he didn't want any American aid, he didn't want anybody in his province, he was doing fine, he didn't need any help. So I said, "Well, Colonel, first of all, we don't want to come in and change what you're doing. I've been in Vietnam before, and we just want to try to figure out the ways and means of supporting you. You tell us

what it is you're doing and we'll figure out how to build a program around that and provide you with some help." So he started launching into the various types of things that he was doing, and I said, "Basically, the ideas that we have kind of fit into that framework. If you want to do this, you can use this section of the program to do that." So he warmed up. Then I said, "Our idea is to give you the flexibility to deploy these funds and use these funds without having to come back to Saigon. So what we're going to do is set this committee up down there. It's really your committee, and I'll send a representative down there to work with you."

Well, he and I became close friends over a period of time and he told me later, "You know, you sent John O'Donnell down here, and here comes this freckle-faced kid that doesn't look more than about fifteen, and I said to myself what are they doing? Do they know what they're doing? I don't need any babies down in this province, I've got enough problems." And he said, "You know, John was quiet and unassuming and a good listener, and in about three months' time, I came to depend on him more than any single person in that province, including my deputy or any other Vietnamese."

There's a guy who's coming up here in July; he's still working for AID, he's down in Peru. He's the only AID employee decorated by the Peruvians for service to Peru in the last fifteen years. He's a wonderful guy, and you should talk to him.

G: What's his name?

P: John O'Donnell.

G: Oh, John O'Donnell. I've got him down. He's going to be here in July?

P: Yes.

G: I'll see if I can arrange a trip.

P: He's coming, I guess it's about mid-July; he's coming back for reassignment, so he's going to be here.

G: Would you spell that colonel's name, Chau?

P: C-H-A-U. I just use that by way of illustration. We got a number of things [that] really were going well. The so-called strategic hamlet program went a lot better in the center of Vietnam than it did in the south. There had been, by the time we got involved, too much sort of massive relocation of people in a number of provinces, Long An being one of them, and to try to straighten that out and to try to compensate people and so forth was a long and painful process.

There were some provinces, like Kien Hoa, where the province chiefs were really good. I think that there was no province chief who was up to the level of Chau, but gradually you could see progress being made in terms of area pacified, people supporting the government, in terms of your ability to go into these areas day and night. The area was expanding, and continued to expand, and there were a number of provinces in central Vietnam where this was going on at a very good rate, until the government hit the Buddhist crisis in the late spring and early summer of 1963. Then things became pretty well paralyzed and then started to go backwards.

G: That was a real watershed, then, the Buddhist crisis?

P: Yes, that was a watershed in that the way it was handled alienated an awful lot of support that Diem had, particularly in the army itself. Nhu was kind of the guy who had the most influence and sort of master-

mind the government's campaign against the Buddhists. He had some very warped and peculiar views of what was going on. It led into real errors in the way that thing was handled. It could have been, I think, resolved early on. Diem was even at one point willing to go up to Hue and sit down with the Buddhist leaders, and I think maybe that might have resolved the thing, but he didn't do it and it just went from bad to worse.

In the meantime, we started out--for example, one of the kinds of programs we had was a program of distributing an improved breed of piglets to farm families in the center, many of whom had never had a cash crop in their lives. We actually instituted simultaneously five major changes in the way the Vietnamese raised pigs. Not only were these pigs different, they were fed sweet potato cuttings, which was different; they were put in concrete pigpens, which was different; the pigpens were cleaned out constantly, which was different; they were not permitted to run loose; they were inoculated, and they grew about twice as big, twice as fast. The result was that we started early in 1963 with this program, and by June of 1963, we had distributed pigs to something like thirty thousand families. We were fortunate in that there had been a--the one thing that AID had done was they had started some agriculture experimental stations, and they had a fair amount of breeding stock to begin with, and then we supplemented that from the Philippines and elsewhere that we knew would do well in Vietnam. We had them flown in.

The impact was really quite something in central Vietnam, because all of a sudden you had farm families that literally had never had any

money before in their lives being able to sell these hogs on market. You could see the impact in the villages in terms of people taking old straw huts and beginning to put up houses with brick in them, and this kind of thing. It was quite something. This was the kind of thing we were doing.

We had another program of fertilizer. We distributed an enormous amount of fertilizer and improved crop yields incredibly. We had some Taiwanese technicians, who were the best agricultural technicians, who not only got the Vietnamese--well, they got them growing soybeans in a number of areas and that was a good cash crop. Their technique was really good. What they'd do was that they wouldn't set up a model farm or anything like that. They would try to find somebody who was a poor to average farmer in a village, and somebody who was willing to work with them, too. But they'd deliberately not pick the guy who was successful, they'd pick some guy who was not successful, or not particularly successful. They'd work with him, and he would do it; he would raise the soybeans and sell them, and all of a sudden he'd have money in his hand. Then you couldn't keep these people away from the door of the Chinese technicians with a stick. Everybody came around and said, "We want to get in on this because, hell, if he can do it, I can."

G: That's clever, yes.

P: And it was the same thing--that's why the pig program spread so rapidly was we deliberately picked people who were the poorest. In some cases the guy didn't even have any land, had to rent the land to put his pigpen on. In one case, a guy tore down his house to build a pigpen! That's the only land he had was this straw hut; he built a pigpen

instead of the hut, and he stayed in one part of the pigpen and the pigs in the other. I kid you not.

G: That takes a strong stomach, I know. Anybody who's been around pigs knows that.

P: Anyhow, that was the real exciting part, and I feel to this day that had somehow we been able to keep that kind of thing going, and the Diem government had not gotten into such serious political problems, political trouble, we might have been able to pull it off.

That's just kind of an overview of the kinds of things--

G: That's fine. I'm wondering what it was about the Buddhist crisis that connected it to the strategic hamlet program. My impression is--it may be wrong--

P: The only thing that connected it was the fact that the--and its impact was particularly felt around Saigon or wherever the Buddhists were strong, like up in Hue. It was felt around Saigon because the army was paralyzed. They were all in the barracks. Nobody wanted to move any troops anyplace; they didn't want to move them out to provide security, so a lot of hamlets were left unprotected.

G: And got knocked off.

P: And got knocked off. Demoralization started to set in.

G: What about the stories you hear about the bad reporting that was coming out of the field on some sides, about progress?

P: The problem was that the military tended to report things that were not significant. They were things that McNamara wanted to hear about, like in the regular army operations, how many bodies did they count and how many weapons did they recover, and all that wasn't relevant to anything

that was really happening of any importance. And of course, the Vietnamese, like anybody else, if that's how you're going to measure my performance, I'm going to exaggerate. Anybody who gets in the line of fire is a VC, so that's a body. And of course that just proliferated to the nth degree when we got big forces in there; it's the same thing. But it had already started.

The other thing was that, sure, the hamlet--a lot of the province chiefs tended to exaggerate their progress to Saigon, to look good. We put out a report--the first report was in June--in which we did a first, I think, province-by-province assessment of the program. And it was quite critical in many areas. It also said where it was going good. Not only [did] we put this out, but we gave it to the Vietnamese. I had it translated into French and sent it to Diem, because I thought they should know what we thought about what was going on and that they should have an accurate idea of what the problems were.

These reports became a kind of a cause célèbre, because later on McNamara said, "Why was I never shown any of these reports?" Well, they didn't fit into the conventional reporting system, for which he had been so responsible to begin with and which didn't have much meaning. These were more kinds of evaluations and intangible assessments, not numbers.

G: Now, did these reports stop at you and Diem, or were they coordinated--?

P: No, we sent them to everybody. We sent them to the Ambassador, we sent them to [Paul] Harkins, we sent them to everybody, but they didn't get into the reporting system as it existed.

The other thing is that people like [Victor] Krulak used to come over, and they'd only talk to the colonels and the generals, and all

they'd hear was the good news. So that's all he heard. And I have to say, there were some--I attended one briefing up in--what's the name of that area to the north and west of Bien Hoa?

G: An Loc?

P: No, not An Loc. The Iron Triangle it's called, the famous Iron Triangle, where the VC traditionally, going back to the thirties, even, had some significant organization. They had a lot of underground tunnels and everything else. They launched a big operation up there, a big sweep, and search and destroy. They came rolling in with troop carriers and tanks and everything else. I think they encountered about two or three VC during the whole thing. Occasionally some VC would poke his head up out of the hole and take a shot at somebody. After this was over, they had a briefing there when Krulak came out, and I attended this briefing. It was given by a Colonel Miller. It was all of this business about how many forces were deployed, and how they had smashed the VC infrastructure in the Iron Triangle, and so forth and so on. I went up to him afterwards and I said, "I've just been out there, and I've talked to some of your people that have been out there on the ground. I don't know what place it is you're talking about, and what great victory it is you're talking about, but it sure as hell didn't happen out there. I don't know why you're telling this bullshit"--you know, I really got upset about it--"to people coming in here from Washington." He said, "Well, this is all the statistics and blah blah blah." Yes, you know, he wanted to look good; it was a big operation. But it was meaningless, absolutely meaningless.

G: I'm trying to remember if that's the Operation Rising--

P: No, no. Rising Sun was the first resettlement-pacification thing that was started before Harkins even got out there.

G: [Lionel] McGarr was still there then.

P: McGarr was still there.

Anyway, that's to try to answer your question.

G: Okay. It was a question of security then? The Buddhists--

P: I think the question of bad reporting had to do with the fact that the way the reporting system was set up, the way the whole U.S. effort was structured, the hierarchical nature of it, the fact that it was very hard for the kind of a feel that the province military adviser had to get through to the top, because it didn't fit into a form. You go down there and he could give you a reading very fast on what was going on. This accounted for this big blowup in the NSC when I came back and Krulak was saying we are winning the war, especially in the Delta.

G: Let's talk about that.

P: I said we weren't, and I'd just been down in Long An province two days before and the provincial adviser had said, "We're in bad shape."

G: This is the military adviser?

P: Yes.

Let me tell you what happened. The VC in the last week came into two hundred hamlets, at night. They made the people take down the barbed wire fence, made them destroy their own houses. I've got people out there with no security now. I can't get the army to provide them with any security. These hamlets are just destroyed. They're there still and some of the people have left.

And he gave me a statistic on how much barbed wire had been cut into pieces. God, it was kilometers and kilometers.

So I just reeled all this off because I'd just been there. Well, that provoked a real confrontation. McNamara was shaking his head the whole time I was talking about that. And then the reason--what happened was that Krulak had gone to the Delta, basically, and around Saigon, presenting the military side. Then you had Joe Mendenhall spending most of his time up in Hué, who had excellent contact with the total "outs," the real dissidents, so far as presenting a political point of view, purely political. And Kennedy did say, "Did you two guys go to the same country?" Because there's no way that you could match these two guys [up].

Then the President was told that I was there, and did he want to listen to what I had to say, and he said yes. So I said, "Well, I don't like to contradict General Krulak, but I have to tell you, Mr. President, that we're not winning the war, particularly in the Delta. The troops are paralyzed, they're in the barracks, and this is what is actually going on in one province that's right next to Saigon." And I recited it. Then I went on to say that the Buddhist crisis was a real crisis, that I was very concerned about the political situation, that I thought that eventually, if somehow this thing wasn't resolved, that we might have a coup on our hands by the army. And I thought that was a disaster and that Diem should be saved, and that the only way to do that, in my opinion, was to persuade Diem to get Nhu and Madame Nhu out of the country. That they were the chief source of the problem, and that there was only one guy that I thought could do that, and that was

General Lansdale, and I suggested he send him out there as soon as possible.

Well, I'm giving you a resume of what I said. None of that part of it, by the way, is in that Bromley Smith memorandum. At the end of it he thanked me very much and said, "I want to particularly thank you for your recommendation concerning General Lansdale." That's the last of that.

G: That was the last of that--

P: That's the last of that.

G: --until 1965, I guess.

P: Yes. But there's a lot of water that went over the dam.

G: I think [David] Halberstam says that the province adviser that you referred to got in some hot water.

P: Did he ever, man!

G: Tell me about that.

P: Well, I wasn't there, but I was told when I got back things were pretty chilly with MACV, and I was told that MACV was turned upside down for two days to prove that I was a liar, that I was wrong. They found out that I had gone down there and talked to that provincial adviser, and that poor guy was yanked out of there.

G: What ever became of him, do you know?

P: He was reassigned somewhere. I don't know that his career was permanently damaged, but it certainly didn't do him any good.

G: Earl Young [?], I have that name noted down.

P: Yes, Earl was--I'm trying to recall whether Earl was--yes, we had just sent Earl down there. He was the provincial rep.

G: Down to Long An?

P: Yes. He sat in on our discussion. He's a witness to--

(Laughter)

The funniest thing about it is that after all this foofaraw, when McNamara and [Maxwell] Taylor went out--they went out on a special mission, later, I think it was in September, or early October--he got confirmation of everything that I had told him, that I had said was true, including the statistics on the barbed wire.

(Laughter)

G: That was one statistic they would rather not report, I guess. Did General Krulak jump you during that meeting for your contribution?

P: I remember more of McNamara. I think at one point we may have clashed. I don't remember that, to be honest with you.

G: Was McGeorge Bundy there? Do you remember anything that he may have contributed?

P: No, he didn't say much.

G: Okay. There are several versions of that meeting extant, in the literature.

P: I know there are.

G: Halberstam has one; John Mecklin has a very abbreviated one, and let's see, Roger Hilsman--

P: Roger Hilsman has one.

G: Hilsman and Halberstam are very close.

P: Fairly close.

G: In fact, the phrasing is even the same in some instances. It makes it hard to think that there wasn't some collaboration, or interviewing. Did Halberstam interview you at all?

P: No, he did not. So I don't know, he must have gotten some of this from the guys up with Kennedy, maybe some of it from Hilsman. Hilsman's book came out first, you know.

G: Yes. Before I came down I compared the two accounts, and they're striking in their similarity.

Okay, then you went back.

P: Yes. Well, the reason I had come to Washington was not having any thing to do with this, but my father was very ill. He was actually dying of cancer and my mother urged me to come back, of course, and I did.

G: When did you go back to Vietnam then?

P: I stayed here for a week or so and then I went back, and at that point I decided I would have to leave. I sent my wife and children on ahead of me and I stayed on to kind of clean up. That period happened to coincide with the coup. I left about a week or so after the coup.

G: After the coup? Where were you when the coup took place?

P: I was over at a friend's house.

G: In Saigon?

P: Yes.

G: Can you recall the action?

P: I can remember a couple of things. One was that I had been in to see Diem about two days before. Everybody at that point knew that something was in the wind, and I remember very poignantly--one of the reasons I had gone to see him was, one, to sort of bring him up to date on what

was happening with the strategic hamlet program, and, two, I had been attacked personally in the *Saigon Post* or *Times* that was a Nhu-run newspaper, claiming that I was going to take over from John Richardson and I was secretly the new head of the CIA. (Laughter)

G: That brush seems to tar an awful lot of people.

P: Actually, that got picked up, by the way--this is one of those ironies, believe it or not--Malcolm Browne picked this thing up in a damn newspaper article, as if it had some verisimilitude to it.

Anyhow, Nhu was going bananas at this point, plotting counter coups, and there were hit lists of people being published--I mean, not published, but there was a crazy brother of Madame Nhu's in the palace, and he was running around saying "We've got an assassination list," and he gave it to Denis Warner, who gave it to me. I passed it on to the embassy. Oh, you talk about--I did it, in a way, for fun, because I knew this guy was a nut, but I sent it on down to the embassy, anyway, and Jesus, you ought to see the--everybody went aaagh!

(Laughter)

G: I heard that John Mecklin's name was at the top of the list fairly consistently.

P: No, I don't think John's was. Well, yes, I guess he was on it. But part of the irony was that they put Richardson on the damn list, and Richardson had been very close to Nhu. But anyway, it was a nutty period.

But I wanted to go in and talk to Diem because I wanted to set him straight about what I had said in Washington, and the fact that what I

tried to do and was unable to do in terms of getting Ed out. You know, he was always very, very nice with me.

G: Did Diem want Lansdale back?

P: Yes, badly. Jesus. The first time I came out there, in July of 1962, he asked me what I could do, and I went over and talked to the Ambassador about it, and I really couldn't get much movement.

G: Why not?

P: Everybody thought that they had everything under control. I talked to them again about it later on. I must have talked to [Frederick] Nolting about it at least three times, as things got worse. Anyway--

G: There's a rumor that Kennedy was thinking of appointing Lansdale ambassador at one point.

P: No, at one point not rumor, he actually proposed him, and I think it got vetoed by both [Dean] Rusk and McNamara, I'm not sure.

G: Why?

P: Rusk, because he was not a foreign service guy.

G: He wasn't a diplomat.

P: He was viewed as antidiplomat. I mean, he was a nonestablishment, nonforeign-service, kind of antitypical foreign service. . . .

G: Breaker of bureaucratic crockery?

P: Yes. Unconventional.

G: And, too, I suppose, if you have Lansdale, what's the use of having another ambassador? I can see that, too.

P: That was the reason not to send him out in a lesser position, and the reason not to send him in as ambassador was that he didn't fit their picture of what an ambassador should be, of course, which was not what

we needed in Vietnam anyway. We didn't need a regular ambassador in Vietnam.

Well, I was just telling you that I went in to see him, and one of the things that he poignantly asked me was, "Are the military planning a coup?" And I looked at him and I said, "Yes, sir, I think they are."

G: What did you base that on?

P: Just a feeling, and the news, and I had friends. Lou Conein's a personal friend of mine, so I had some feeling of what was going on.

He didn't ask me anything more. He knew pretty well what was happening to him. It was just sad, it was pathetic. I really went away feeling just down in the dumps. And then when the coup came, the next morning I went into the palace. Of course, it was all shot to hell. The chairs that we were sitting in were all sort of thrown all over the goddamn place, with a couple of artillery holes and--sad. God, you know, I wanted to sit down and cry. And I was so upset when I heard that he'd been killed.

G: A lot of people were. Apparently Kennedy was highly agitated. Of course, you were in an agitated state at this time, but did you think the situation could still be salvaged?

P: Yes, I thought so. I thought so, even after Diem went down. But the more we built up, the more we became involved with conventional forces, the less sanguine I became.

G: Because it was less of a Vietnamese war?

P: Yes, because we were obviously going down the road of the French, even though we didn't mean to, and that wasn't our intent. We were certainly painting a picture in a way that made it very difficult for the Vietnam-

ese to claim that they were the government, that they were running anything. And that just helped the VC politically.

G: You'd known Big [Duong Van] Minh, I presume, hadn't you?

P: Yes.

G: What was your estimate of his capability?

P: I liked Big Minh; he had a lot of political charm. But he wasn't a terribly decisive guy. Somehow, I think that if we had been able to get in and work with--also I think he suffered from the fact that Diem had been killed, because that just alienated the Catholics. There's no way that he was going to enjoy their trust.

G: Did he order Diem's death, do you think?

P: I don't know. That is very, very obscure as to how the hell that all came about. That was a stupid decision and, God, we paid, they paid, everybody paid.

G: Who do you think knows the answer to that? Does Lou Conein know?

P: I'm not sure Lou does; I've talked to him about it and it's still very obscure. I mean, they know who did it, but they don't know who gave the order.

G: Who did it, that aide?

P: Yes. I've forgotten what the guy's name is.

G: I can't remember his name either.

P: He got killed, of course, not very long afterward. His life expectancy was very low from that moment on.

G: He was an embarrassment.

P: Of course.

G: So you came back about a week, ten days or so, after the coup?

P: Yes.

G: What were you doing then, when you came back?

P: I came back because my father died, and I took over the firm. I continued as kind of a consultant to AID part-time. They were hoping that maybe I could go back. I didn't know what state the business was in. I found it was in terrible condition and really required--my mother was widowed, and I really had a lot of things to look after and I just couldn't go back. I did help them recruit people as additional provincial reps, and one of them was Vann.

G: John Paul Vann. How did you--?

P: Yes. Well, I had known him out there. We had some mutual respect for each other, and I had heard he was retired and where he was, and I just called him on the phone and said, "Look, I don't know whether I'm going back, but in the meantime the program's being run by Bert Fraleigh, my deputy, and AID--I've talked to them, and they'd really like to have you out there. I think you're the kind of person who would enjoy doing this. You always were oriented towards action at the local level and in the provinces." As a matter of fact, his MOS [Military Occupation Specialty], if I recall correctly, was both infantry and military government. So--

G: I think he had an advanced degree in political science.

P: Yes, he did. And he was very interested in what we were doing. So he said, "Well, I'll seriously consider it." He came to Washington and decided to do it. So I was delighted to see that.

G: Was the military delighted to see him come back, I wonder?

P: Well, you know, they accepted him.

G: Did they?

P: Yes. I think some things that--well, Harkins was still there, but still he was accepted.

G: Did you know Vann's military boss--?

P: "Coal Bin Willie" Wilson? No, Coal Bin Willie was not his boss.

G: No, he was a full colonel and he helped create IV Corps when they made a fourth corps.

P: Yes. Who was he?

G: He is a professorial full colonel from Texas A&M [University], Daniel Boone Porter.

P: Yes, I think I remember him.

G: I'd heard he was involved in a controversy recently, because Halberstam had cited him as one of his main sources the other day in--

P: What, Ap Bac, or what?

G: Yes. On the Ap Bac.

P: The famous Ap Bac situation?

G: Yes. And Colonel Porter was just appalled. What about Ap Bac? Do you know any of the story to that?

P: No. No more than--

G: What's been printed?

P: I know that Vann was outraged, because he felt that--oh, what's the name of the general that I knew very well?

G: [Huynh Van] Cao?

P: Yes, Cao. Because Cao was the presidential aide back in 1955. Cao had not handled the thing properly and [had] refused to really go in and close.

G: Did Vann talk to Halberstam?

P: I would guess he did, but I don't know. There's a guy named Neil Sheehan who was out there who's doing a book on Vann, and I don't know what's happened to Neil's book, because it hasn't appeared.

G: My understanding is that he has either expanded it into or laid it down to write *the* book on Vietnam.

P: Oh, really?

G: That's my understanding. I don't have that from him, but I have it from a couple of people who know him, and that this is going to press a year from this fall.

P: Well, we've got Vietnam blossoming out all over. You've got this current TV series, you've got one that the--I think folks up in Boston have produced--

G: WGBH, right.

P: That will be on--

G: Have you watched any of the episodes that are on?

P: No, I meant to watch the second one and I just didn't get around to it. That was the early years, and I have no idea what the hell it--you know, when they show Wilfred Burchett in the first episode, boy, I'm already turned off.

(Interruption)

G: You were saying that you knew Wilfred Burchett?

P: Well, he was posing as a legitimate journalist but then reporting, of course, totally the communist side of it, going all the way back to 1954-55. And he did the same thing in Laos. He would file reports somewhere up on the Lao-Hanoi border, "Dateline so-and-so, with the

peaceful Lao forces," when the North Vietnamese had had a hundred thousand troops in Laos.

(Laughter)

Oh, Jesus. The only thing that bugs me is that this guy gets quoted as being some kind of legitimate reporter when he's nothing but a propaganda mouthpiece, and never has been, has always been--he's interesting to read, because he does tell you a lot of details about how the VC operated and what they were doing. And you're right, you use him for that and you can get some fairly accurate stuff, but. . . .

G: Well, he talked about the use of camouflage and how effective they were with that, and the development of the [Ho Chi Minh] Trail over the years and things like that. He doesn't look anything like what I thought he would look like, however.

P: Yes.

G: I understand the well-fed sort of--

P: Yes.

G: He looks like a very large man.

Now, you came back and you took up the reins of your family business. I imagine you followed Vietnamese affairs in the newspapers and so on.

P: I did, of course, and then I was in touch with Ed and other guys who'd been in Vietnam, and we had a series of meetings about what to do and published some papers. Also, I went down to see [Hubert] Humphrey. I got in a--you know, Humphrey was the only guy that really would listen.

G: Really?

P: Yes. Yes, and he became a very strong proponent of sending Ed out there. Finally, Johnson kind of gave in and said, "All right, send your goddamn Lansdale out there."

G: Is that a quote? (Laughter)

P: I think that's a quote, yes. You might ask Bill Connell.

G: Okay.

P: William Connell, C-O-N-N-E-L-L, who runs a film-making operation here in town. He was Humphrey's assistant. He lives out in Bethesda.

G: All right, I've got him. Why was Johnson taking that attitude?

P: I don't know. You know, I think in part because Johnson had some very funny ways of--you know, he would spend all this time listening to Barbara Ward on Vietnam, who knew nothing, and he never asked anybody in who knew anything about Vietnam, and I never have to this day figured that out, quite. I think that he felt that the people he relied on were the top of the profession and knew what was going on, and that he didn't have to talk to any of the minions. Why he didn't extrapolate from his political experience--I mean, he'd never make that mistake if he were going out to Waterloo, Iowa or something. He would talk to the local political guys, or he'd find somebody who knew the local political situation, but somehow he never extrapolated his political experience in the United States to trying to deal with what was a highly political situation in Vietnam. I think that in part that was because he was relying on some very conventional thinkers, and also people whose experience had been shaped by World War II in Europe, like Maxwell Taylor, and who had the notion that you kind of land your forces and go inland and conquer the country and kill the enemy and win the war.

G: These were years of frustration for you then.

P: Yes, they were, very frustrating. Because we thought that General [Nguyen] Khanh, with all of his defects, still had something going for him, and at one point, if it were handled properly and you had elections for a constituent assembly and some other things, that you could start to build a political base in South Vietnam, for the effort against the VC.

Then when Ed went out, I was involved in helping them, I went out for a month with them and helped the team get started.

G: This was in 1965?

P: Yes, and then I went back out in 1966 for about a month and in 1967, just to--

G: Would you compare those visits, what you saw, what conclusions--?

P: In 1965, that was the beginning and there was some hope that maybe Ed would have some real political responsibility. By 1966, he had gotten in with the Revolutionary Development guy, the general (Thanh) who had a lot of promise and who had a little touch of [Ramon] Magsaysay about him. Oh, what was his name? You know who I'm talking about, I just can't--

G: It wasn't Major [Nguyen] Be?

P: No. Major Be worked for him.

G: I can't call him up.

P: This guy had a feel for people and a real love for people, he really had something. Then he got into trouble because he backed [Nguyen Cao] Ky instead of Thieu.

But things were still, I think, semihopeful in 1966, because there were the elections for the constituent assembly, and this stirred up a lot of interest. Ed had sold the idea of this constituent assembly thing, of writing a constitution and getting elections started, and he'd gotten--you know, there were a number of good people, including Chau, [who] ran. He ran--it was very interesting. Here was a guy who'd been in that province, and who had been out of the province, without a responsibility for about a year or two, and who went back and ran from that province and won. It'll give you an idea that this guy really had done something down there. He ran as an independent, too, I mean, he was not tied in with Thieu or Ky or any kind of faction.

That was a period of some hope and excitement, of maybe some kind of a political cause could be--some sort of spark could be struck. But then it sort of foundered because in part the Vietnamese didn't know quite what to do with it. Ed had some wonderful ideas, which I think the Vietnamese would have been very enthusiastic about, but he couldn't get those sold through the mission.

G: Why not?

P: He was opposed by Habib, who--well, there was a power struggle going on and, see, he was treading on everybody's turf. Advising the constituent assembly was obviously the function of the political section of the embassy.

G: And that was Phil Habib.

P: If it had anything to do with public information, it was Barry Zorthian's function. If it had anything to do with AID, it was some body else's function. Well, the truth was that these functions were all

very narrowly seen and very nonoperative in nature, and very detached from the Vietnamese, and very unknowing of what the Vietnamese were capable of, or even how you light a fire like this. So the result was that the thing just sort of--you know, the steam sort of petered out of this and it became a kind of conventional deal where it was a power struggle between Thieu and Ky and eventually resolved in Thieu's favor.

G: It seems to me that Lansdale would have been pretty frustrated, too.

P: He was very frustrated. I remember him coming back--maybe it was when I went out in 1967--after a meeting of the Mission Council, saying, "I don't know what country they're talking about down there, but it sure as hell isn't Vietnam." That's the Mission Council in the country, not the cabinet back here.

G: Do you know anything about the later pacification efforts, the CORDS and the Phoenix--?

P: I know it got bigger and bigger, and presumably better, and certainly they achieved some degree of coordination, but I think it became so big and so unwieldy and it still--you know, where's the political base? If you don't have the political base, it doesn't make any difference what you're doing.

G: Right.

P: Also, the American military effort and advisory effort was getting so massive that I'm not sure that anybody had it under control and knew what was going on. It's a little like [David] Stockman talking about the budget. I mean, what do all these figures mean? Nobody knows what they mean. I remember in 1967--was it 1967? Yes, September 1967--this friend of mine, who was a journalist, a Vietnamese, told me that--this

was just after they had had a big pacification program around Vietnam, and before that they'd had some big program where they were going to create--I mean, I'm giving you quotes now--"rings of steel" around Saigon.

G: HOP TAC? Was that one of them?

P: Yes, I think HOP TAC. I think it was HOP TAC. He said, "There's a very interesting thing happened just outside of Saigon, outside of Cholon. There was some militia down there that were manning these posts in this one village, or hamlet. The VC ambushed them, killed fifteen of them, and there were dead and wounded out there, and the rest of them retired inside of their post and nobody got to them for eight hours." I said, "What?" And he said, "Yes. That's what I hear." I said, "Can you take me down there? I'd like to talk to these guys and find out." He said, "Sure." So he drove by the next morning in his *quatre-chevaux*, you know, one of those old Renaults, and we went down there. We just drove down there, drove out on this narrow road, four miles out of Saigon, to this little hamlet out there. Jesus, we got to the hamlet, it was about ten o'clock in the morning. Not a soul. Everybody was closeted inside the post; they're still terrified. So I go and ask some questions through him and also in French with one guy there, the lieutenant, who spoke some French, and we went out and looked at where they'd set the claymore mine for the ambush, and so forth and so on, and he described the whole thing to me. I said, "You didn't get any relief for eight hours?" He said, "No." I said, "I don't understand this, you're only four miles from Saigon." He said, "We don't depend on Saigon. We depend on the regimental headquarters over in Long An." I said, "Well,

now, tell me exactly what the distance is." He said, "Well, it's about twenty-five kilometers thataway across the rice paddies."

G: No road?

P: No road. I said, "This is very strange. I mean, this doesn't make any sense." So I went back and I wrote this up, and I gave a report to Ed. Ed took it into the Mission Council and passed it around. [William] Westmoreland got upset, very indignant, said that this can't be true, pounded on the desk. So Ed said, "Well, why don't you send somebody out there you trust to find out?" So he appointed a general. Well, the general we knew pretty well; I've forgotten his name now. So I said sure. I called up my friend An [?], and I said, "An, we've got a visitor who wants to go out with us and see the same thing." So the general shows up in civvies, and An shows up in a taxi, saying, "My car broke down. I don't have a car; we'll have to take a taxi." I said, "All right, I'll pay for the taxi, let's go." So we had a damn general, you know, he had his .45 inside of his shirt--

(Laughter)

--who thought maybe he was going to get ambushed out there, or kidnapped or something. And we all went out there. And we interviewed the same people. He turned in the same report, said, "Yes, that's true." Not a goddamn thing happened. If you want to know why the VC were able to put major forces in and around Saigon and get them into Saigon during the Tet offensive in 1968, there's the answer. All right? That's the kind of security system they were operating. Part of it had to do with politics. They didn't want all of the security forces in Saigon, you know. But still, it was stupid, and the American command was so

insensitive, I mean, so hierarchical, bureaucratic. You know, the whole thing was so overblown that something like this that should have illuminated a real problem for them, an obvious problem, because, hell, if you could do that, you could put anybody in and around Saigon, large forces, and nobody could ever know about it. And they didn't do a thing about it. I remember that well. That one I really remember.

G: Do you remember an Australian colonel named Francis Serong?

P: Yes. Yes, sure.

G: He was supposed to be some kind of a guerrilla expert. Was that what he was?

P: Yes, he had had a lot of experience in Malaysia.

G: In Malaysia?

P: Yes. He was a nice guy. Ted Serong.

G: What was his capacity in Vietnam? Was he with the Australian advisory group?

P: He was, I think, in the military attaché's office, in kind of a part of the Australian advisory mission.

G: He's been quoted as saying, in May of 1963, that the strategic hamlet program is overextended, leaves too many blank spots, things in that line, and General Krulak is supposed to have challenged him on that. Do you remember any incident involving this?

P: No. But I think we were saying pretty much essentially the same thing, particularly in the Delta.

G: One other related question: I came across a USOM report in 1963 which pointed out problems with the strategic hamlet program, and it particu-

larly came down hard on the inconvenience that it caused the highlanders in some areas.

P: Yes. That was our report, I'm sure.

G: I was going to ask, was that your report?

P: Yes.

G: Okay. What haven't we talked about that we need to talk about subsequently about Vietnam?

P: I don't know. The last time I went there was in 1968 and that was only for about--I was in the Far East on private business and I just dropped by for four days. I stayed with Ed. All I remember was they rocketed Saigon that night and, boy, that was a--

G: Would that have been in May, somewhere?

P: No, that was, I think, in July or August of 1968. This was after mini-Tet.

G: Okay. That's what I thought you might have been referring to.

P: No, but they were rocketing Saigon with some regularity. You know, they'd fire about four or five or six in and nobody knew where the hell they were going to land and, boy, are they something. Whew.

G: Yes, they're scary.

P: Well, during this period, this guy I knew who had a house out on what was Ngo Dinh Quoi [?], which became Independence Avenue, the main street coming in from the airport, which was across from the place that we had lived in, in 1962 and 1963, he had an incredible thing happen to him. He was a Catholic. A priest came to his house. He had been sleeping out back because he had kind of a servant's quarters that he'd fixed up a little better than servant's quarters, in back of his house. He slept

back there usually, just for protection, because he had been a fairly wealthy industrialist and he wasn't too sure whether somebody was going to lob a grenade in the front window or something. And this priest came to visit him so he let the father sleep back there, and he went and slept up in his bedroom in the main house up on the second story, which he had not been used to doing. That night a rocket came over the house, just missed the top of the house, and went boom, down into the room where the priest was, killed the priest, of course, and blew a concrete beam that was about this wide and this thick and about twenty feet long, about thirty feet. Just wrecked the hell out of everything back there, killed the priest, never touched him.

G: Those rockets are scary things, I'll vouch for that.

What was Lansdale's state of mind when you saw him then in 1968?

P: I think he'd gotten very depressed. He couldn't get anything done. The Vietnamese, even if you had good ideas, you had to have some influence to be able to influence the U.S.

G: What do you make of the stories that the Tet offensive pretty well gutted the VC structure in South Vietnam?

P: I think that it killed a lot of their regulars, and it killed a lot of their people, and certainly they were in a weakened state. In terms of their structure, the political structure was still around. Certainly it weakened them.

G: Yes, there were claims that a lot of deep-cover people surfaced during Tet and then of course couldn't go back down later on.

P: I think that's probably true. Of course, it was a tremendous psychological victory for them. And they knew--they'd already won the

previous war [with] France, why shouldn't they win this one [with] the United States? They knew what they were doing.

G: What was your reaction to the President's speech, the famous speech--

P: When he resigned?

G: --March 31, 1968?

P: I was just knocked off my feet, really.

G: Everybody remembers where they were, like Pearl Harbor. Can you remember?

P: Yes, I was at home.

G: What effect did you think this was going to have on the Vietnam business?

P: I don't know; I was just stunned that. . . .

G: Yes, I know. I rose up--

P: Then I was very leery later on about the negotiations. I was a strong supporter of Humphrey and very upset about what happened in that election. Funny, I had a conversation with him and Bill Connell afterwards, because he was very bitter about the Vietnamese. He thought the Vietnamese had really tried to pull one on him, but I tried to explain that that whole thing was something made in America and no Vietnamese could have afforded to say, "Yes, I support this." The army would have thrown Thieu out overnight. Those were the political realities out in Vietnam.

G: Were you involved in the problems that the Vietnamese were facing after the debacle in 1975, getting people out and relocating people?

P: Yes, sure. I helped--

G: Friends?

P: --with friends, and I was on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors here at that time. We, as you would expect, reported out the first resolution welcoming them. I was very interested in trying to get the county moving, and the metropolitan area moving, of course, and doing something about it. I'd say that I had two lows in Vietnam, one was after Diem was killed and the other one was that one. That had to be the pits. It was really frustrating, because I knew that there was never part of the deal of Vietnamization that the Vietnamese army was going to be left to face the North Vietnamese with no help whatsoever. And Congress kept cutting back on their arms and ammunition, so I felt it was a pretty raw deal. And I think we're still--I don't mean us psychologically, but I think the degree to which other people trust us around the world suffered from that. I think one of the reasons why the Israelis are so damn belligerent and so hellbent on protecting themselves regardless of what the U.S. does is that some lessons were drawn out of that experience. I think that's very unfortunate, because then you get all kinds of other effects.

G: Are you paying any attention to the El Salvador situation?

P: El Salvador? Yes, of course.

G: What do you make of all the parallels that are being drawn in the print and so forth?

P: I think that if we keep drawing them maybe we can make it another Vietnam.

(Laughter)

Like a self-fulfilling prophecy. There obviously are a lot of things that are not the same. That kind of war has a lot of similarities to

it, but the political situation is entirely different. And I think that the elections highlighted something about that. All of a sudden it wasn't a country of just fourteen families; there's obviously a sizeable middle class there. Secondly, public opinion in El Salvador is obviously very much splintered on how to deal with this problem. It's a very complex situation, and the notion that one hundred guys down there who aren't even allowed to protect themselves with weapons somehow represent some Vietnam involvement is so absurd--

G: You're referring to the case where the officer was seen with a rifle?

P: Yes. Well, I'm just referring to the whole way that's been played up. The other thing which is really extraordinary is that here we've had these guys down there and not one of them has been killed.

G: That can't be an accident.

P: How come? How come if the other side is so sharp and so capable and so determined? There are a lot of questions I could ask about that place. I know something about it, by the way. I know something about El Salvador. It's a country and a people, and some of its history. I know a lot about Latin America. My wife comes from Chile, I speak Spanish, et cetera, et cetera. I don't think this administration understood anything about El Salvador when they started or they wouldn't have blown the thing up as some big East-West test case. So they're responsible for part of the problem. But then you get this reaction, which is totally out of this world. There was a film on Latin America last night which is the worst kind of communist propaganda piece I have ever seen shown on public TV. Fortunately, they had a panel afterwards that just knocked it to shreds, but still, it's so bad, you know, that--

G: That's a good--

P: God, Vietnam was difficult enough--

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II.