INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: EDWARD G. LANSDALE

INTERVIEWER: TED GITTINGER

PLACE: General Lansdale's residence, McLean, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

G: [Tell me about] the purpose of your visit to Indochina with the O'Daniel mission in the summer of 1953.

L: General [John W.] O'Daniel had come through the Philippines on the way to Indochina. He stayed overnight at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, and he said that he wanted to talk to me about guerrilla wars, which I'd just been through one in the Philippines, and was still in one as a matter of fact. We talked quite a bit about what he was going to see in Indochina and the problems of a government and an army facing guerrilla tactics and similar struggle. At that point, he asked me if I'd come along with him. I thought he was talking about two or three days' visit to Indochina, so I was quite busy in the Philippines, I said, yes, sure, I'd come along. This was about eleven o'clock at night. I said, "What time are you going over there?" He said, "Wheels up at six in the morning." (Laughter) So I said, "Jesus, I'll see if I can disengage here and get some clothes and so on to come with you."

Anyhow, I did that, come along. Of course, we caught the French by great surprise when we got to Saigon. They hadn't any idea that

I was coming along and my reputation was such out in Asia that they weren't too sure that they wanted me anywhere near them, because I was first of all an anti-colonial, I'd made that very plain. And the political views that I held were ones that they were afraid would rub off somehow or other when I got over there. General [Paul] Ely [Henri Navarre?] himself, personally, we had lunch with him when we got in there, and he said, no, he'd welcome us. He was happy that I'd come along and would I do some things for him while I was there? So I said, yes, I'd be happy to do anything that I could. So he asked me if I would contribute ideas to the annexes for his plan. I said, "What's the plan?" He said, "I'll give you a briefing on that with your whole crew," which he did the next day. But while I was there, I wrote ideas on the unconventional aspects of this plan. That would be first of all his combat raw intelligence collection throughout the country and the psychological warfare annex, the stuff behind enemy lines and working with groups. Let's see, there were some others, anyhow, it was similar to that. And he was very nice and wrote me a separate set of orders, which weren't orders. They were really introducing me to his commanders there to show me what was going on and let me have a real look.

So here instead of two or three days, it wound up six weeks with--I ran out of clean clothes and everything else, and really became fascinated with the thing. I learned a great deal not only for the U.S., which I passed on immediately out in country, also in

O'Daniel's report--I had reports of my own and so on that they could use--also to the French and to Navarre. So that with his help and interest in what I was doing, he got me in with the French clandestine organization, with the G-2's in each command out of the psychological operations from each command, so much so that I got quite a good hard look at things and as much as you can do in a hurry. This was completely an informal type of thing on my part.

G: Now, I gather you contributed to General O'Daniel's report, but did you have occasion also to report directly back to the United States or were you on that kind of a mission?

L: No, I didn't. I don't think I reported back directly at all. I gave reports in to our mission in Saigon, to various members there including the CIA, the USIA ambassador in the political section.

G: How big an operation did the CIA have at that time?

L: I think it was very small. I don't know. I got in with the SEEDE there, their counterparts among the French, and they said, "Let us know about them." Among other things I said one of their training camps and all of their brass came down to be with me, to look over their training sections down at Vung Tau. And I got them all in swimming, all nude, skinnydipping. As they came out, I took pictures of them all. I gave them to CIA who were sort of offended. You know, you wanted to know something about them, here are pictures of the bunch. And they were yelling at me, so I said, "Come on, take my picture, too." So I presume they did.

G: How did the situation in Indochina compare with the one that you knew in the Philippines?

L: There were some similarities. It was totally different in one aspect of it. The Vietnamese communists were much nearer success than the Philippine communists ever have been, and they've gone up into a scale of warfare and struggle that was far beyond the Philippines. Of course, the political aims, the organization, the type of tactics employed and everything were very similar. The politics were very familiar to me. The French weren't fighting them the way we'd fought in the Philippines. There was a big difference in the attitudes in each of the sections of the country. So there were similarities and dissimilarities, both of them. As a matter of fact, I found the difference between a white man fighting, a European, fighting out in Asia against an enemy very different than Asians fighting Asians. And Indochina was the white man's war against the Asians. And being shut out in terms of intelligence and many other things that we just didn't accomplish at all in the Philippines.

G: Why weren't the French making more use of the native Vietnamese troops?

L: The French were looking down on them pretty much. The French <u>colons</u> out there had pretty low opinion of most of the Vietnamese and they let the Vietnamese be auxiliaries to themselves, but fairly low level. So that there was no equal type of a thing at all. The Vietnamese were the orderlies, the guys sitting out at the front

desks stamping papers, going through the pro forma stuff without any real responsibilities or initiative or ability to take care of things as far as the French were concerned.

One or two commands out there--notably the one up in Hanoi--had a respect of the Vietnamese. But the others, I visited them in the three Associated States over in Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam, and in every other command the Vietnamese were--or natives, the Laos, the Khmer, the Cambodians--were just second-rate people as far as the French were concerned.

G: Did the French ever change their minds on that score that you know of?

L: I don't think they really did inside. I think they had two [minds]. They had an admiration for certain individuals, but they had let only a few of them be educated. They had let only a few of them in the military go to things like the war college and so on, but they apparently felt most of them were not first-rate people at all, and it was something that they paid for pretty dearly.

G: Did this enter into the advice that you gave General Ely?

L: In part. I was giving a lot of advice. When I'd get to places I'd talk to the G-2 of French commands out in hunting places, and he would tell me he'd send people out to try and collect raw intelligence and he said that none of them would last more than twenty-four hours out there in among the enemy. I was trying to devise ways of getting nets out and so on for their combat use, and there were some things that they said, "Well, you can't trust the natives to do something

like that." You know, you'd have to get out the farmers and whatnot, have to give you simple signs that you could see, either flying or passing on a road and so on to note the presence of an enemy and whatnot. There was a complete cutoff of people on the battlegrounds and in the French troops in a lot of places. And the French were trying real hard; usually the intelligence officers were desperate for information. They were the ones that I was trying to fight. On the psychological operations, there was a chief French psychological operations man who was a professor of the Sorbonne who'd taught Shakespeare, and he would have been very good back in Shakespeare's time, but not for the war that he was fighting. He had no idea, frankly, of the place yet he had wonderful equipment to use, better than we did--

G: Oh, really?

L: --yes, in the Philippines. There was one guy up in Hanoi, a major up there, who had gone to school with [Vo Nguyen] Giap in Hanoi, the university there, and he had the start of a good operation. He had just come out of Compiegne[?], and the French command up there put him in something new. So I sat and worked with him and he was encouraging, because he was an exception to the rule of the French and the Vietnamese getting along with each other. They were real people to him, having gone to school with him and so on, so he understood. I was trying to teach him some combat psychological operations and he was very amenable to them and tried out a number of them. He'd

started a school up there, and I gave some lectures to the people in the school. But otherwise, there was very little to be done to counter the very heavy and the very effective communist anti-French campaign that went on.

G: In the period between that visit and the time you were assigned to Vietnam in May of 1954, did you follow events in Vietnam at all?

L: Well, I followed as far as reading in newspapers and that type of thing, because Dien Bien Phu had taken place while I was away and there were other things like that going on in the press, but I was very busy. I'd been over in the Philippines, and had gone through a very, very tough time there through 1952. Then I'd gotten back here and I attended a meeting over in Defense with State and Defense and a whole group of people. The French were asking for aircraft, I remember, for help in Dien Bien Phu and some other things, and the U.S. was debating on it, and John Foster Dulles in this meeting said, "Oh, I'm happy you're here, Ed. You know we're sending you over there to Indochina," which I hadn't known at all. And I said, "To do what? I don't want to help those French, you know." He said, "No, no, no, just do what you did in the Philippines." So I was then assigned to Indochina. I thought, "Well, I'd better go and get some lessons in French," and there wasn't any in Vietnamese, but I'd get some way of talking to people.

G: Excuse me a second, now, doesn't that put you in a kind of a peculiar position if you're doing what you did in the Philippines, which was

teach the native Filipinos how to build a government, how to fight an insurrection. Now, if you're going to teach the native Vietnamese the same thing, the French are not going to be too delighted with this, are they?

L: Ah, exactly! Well, he said, "Okay, you help them as you can. I think we need you there." I still don't know what he had in mind exactly. Those were my only orders I ever had, incidentally.

G: Does this mean that the State Department is sending you, or Defense is sending you, or the CIA is sending you? Who are you working for at this stage?

L: I'll get into that in a moment. I don't know who. The United States, put it that broadly.

But the next day, I got a call from [Ramon] Magsaysay who had just been made president out in the Philippines when I'd left after that[?]. He said he was having trouble with his congress and as president, would I please come along and help him as liaison with his congress there, because I knew most of them in congress. I said, "Well, I can't. I'm not coming back to the Philippines anymore." He called up two more nights in a row, and said, "Really, I'm in a bad way on this." So the next thing I knew--meanwhile, I got set up right away because I didn't know when I was going out to Indochina, but I got a call again from him, and then I started taking French, and then I got a call from the air force saying, "The President"--meaning Eisenhower--"has just called. He's been talking with President Magsaysay who said he wanted you, so you're getting sent

back to the Philippines." I said, "Goddamn, whoever's sending me out to Indochina better give me a chance to get ready for out there, because I don't know that much about it. I discovered while I was out there that everybody speaks French and I don't, or at least enough of them do, and Vietnamese. So I've got to learn some language, and I got to learn something about the place. I don't know anywhere near enough about it." So they said, "Okay, but you get on out to the Philippines." I said, "Well, let me get back here afterwards and learn something before I get there," which never happened, because I got out to the Philippines and got in over my head with Magsaysay trying to get his presidency set up and going, and I got a message then telling me to proceed immediately to Vietnam. In the end of the thing, they put "God bless you" on it. They knew. I said, "Geez, that's bad news, whatever it is."

G: Who sent the cable, do you remember?

L: I don't know. I long wonder. I asked when I got back; I said, "Who in the hell sent that?" It was a regular transfer message with a citation of where the funds were and everything, which I didn't use because I hooked a ride over there. But I never saw that message before, you know. I thought geez, it must be the end of the world over there.

After Dien Bien Phu I guess the news from Indochina was pretty bad. I had talked to two people meanwhile who both wanted me over there. This General O'Daniel had gone back in as MAAG chief in Saigon. He said, "Oh, by all means, I want you there." Donald

Heath, the ambassador, had stopped by in the Philippines and told me that he'd want me there. I guess they'd both asked for me. So I was to go over and work with them, and they said, "What'll you do over there, you know, for. . . ." I said, "What do you want me as, as the air force attache?" And they said, well, they had one. I said, "I'll go over and be his assistant then. As long as I don't have to spend too much time with him in order to do these other things." So that was arranged.

G: So you were officially assigned to MAAG, is that it?

L: No, originally as an assistant air attache.

G: Oh, okay. That's the embassy. You're right.

L: Yes. But when I got over there, I told them both, "Well, on military affairs it'll be O'Daniel, on political affairs and economic and everything, it will be the Ambassador," and they said, "Fine." So that's what I did. I didn't stay as the assistant attache very long. The bastard hated my guts. He could find no place for me to sit in this office, not even a chair. No place to keep any papers, no place to do anything. And he kept telling me, "You aren't a regular officer, are you?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "I outrank you." And I said, "No, you don't. I happen to outrank you, but we'll let that go." Well, he looked it up, and by God, I outranked him, see, and I was a regular officer, which sort of threw him. He made damn sure he wasn't going to give me anything.

G: What did he think you were or who did he think you were?

L: He thought I was CIA. Everybody out in Asia, in those parts. Not only CIA, I was secretly the head of CIA. I think they still think that out in Asia, all throughout.

Now, who paid me? The air force did. That's all I got. CIA, I really don't want to comment on that because I gave my oath on that some years back and I'm still true to it. But they were a tremendous help to me in terms of support and help with things, not with pay or anything. And I was never a member of any of their stations or regular personnel in places. My teams in the Philippines and in Vietnam would have CIA people in them, but they'd also have military, even have foreigners in them, foreign military and other. Many of whom worked for free, for nothing, just volunteered to help me with things, which no U.S. government agency would ever permit, you know. But they'd do it out of love of country and wanting to help. And I would go ahead and use them.

G: Are any of these people in the United States currently?

L: Yes, yes.

G: Perhaps I could get you to give me some addresses. I'd like to talk to them.

L: Oh, sure. Sure.

G: Okay. Okay. We can do that later.

L: A quite a few incidentally are right in here. I moved into this area because a lot of my old pals were in close here.

G: That's a common pattern, I think, yes.

Now you, apparently, very quickly were able to establish a close relationship with President [Ngo Dinh] Diem. I think most opinion is closer than almost anybody else was ever able to get to him.

L: Outside of two other people who were both in Vietnam[?], two other Americans.

G: Who were they?

L: One of them was this--oh, let me think for a time.

G: Were these maybe MSU [Michigan State University] people?

L: One of them was, the head of the mission whose name has slipped--the other was land reform.

G: Oh, that's Wolf Ladejinsky.

L: Wolf Ladejinsky was, yes, later. But. . . .

G: I didn't know he was dead.

L: Yes. Wolf was fired from AID on terms of--well, I don't know. It wasn't disloyalty, it was a thing of going out of channels and so forth on his part. It had come up over a Chinese or Japanese girl that he'd known. And he was fired and I asked him to be cleared enough to let Diem hire him, and I went to Diem and I said, "Grab that guy as an adviser," which he did.

G: Had you known him before?

L: No, no. I just knew him by reputation and out there in the [inaudible] and I think whatever it was. He was a sixteen or a seventeen or something--it was a very high GS rating--and I think when Diem

discovered what he'd have to pay the guy, he almost fainted, you know. It was higher than his own salary or something. But he used to go over and have breakfast with Diem later on, and the two of them would discuss anything[?] and got very close and quite sentimental about each other, which I felt was good. Diem needed somebody independent talking to him.

G: Didn't they have a falling out later? Did you hear anything to that effect?

L: Somewhat, somewhat, but they made up again. It was a very personal thing. And they were together. But Wolf had gone on, meanwhile, to other countries, other work. Oh, hell, the MSU guy--

G: Fishel.

L: Yes, Wes Fishel. Yes, yes, Wes Fishel. Wes was very close to him, and they had a falling out eventually. I don't know. He sort of turned against Diem and so on, Wes did. But Wes had been very close to him, had known each other up in Japan earlier on.

G: Now, it's a little unusual for someone to, I guess, develop that close a relationship with the head of state. Did this ever complicate your situation with any of the ambassadors, with Heath or [J. Lawton] Collins?

L: It might have, but it really didn't. With Collins, a little bit, but by that time I had become known throughout Asia apparently, to my surprise. People knew about the Philippines, and then counter-propaganda had come up to counter me to make sure that I was a dead

duck with these people and of course that spread around and just made it bigger. They'd know me either favorably or unfavorably all over. So that did me in good stead in Vietnam. The enemy was the one that said that I was head of CIA and head of this powerful force out there of secret agents. So that actually I was in favor. Like I say, "Don't zap this guy because all hell will break loose afterwards," so it was a good insurance policy.

But I didn't say that myself and incidentally, the second time I was out, the CIA station chief came to me and he said, "Goddamn, you got to do something about this." He said, "Everybody thinks you're head of the CIA, and they know I'm station chief here which means I'm the head of the CIA, but they think that you're the head of the CIA wearing the white hats, and I'm the head of the dirty tricks department, you see." And I said, "Why don't you go ahead and behave like you're wearing a white hat, you know, and it's all right, see. I'd tell these people that I'm not, but I know that they still believe that, but I don't have money or anything to hand out."

G: Now, in the winter of 1955, you stated that you went to work for an organization known as TRIM, which stands for Training Relations Instruction Mission--

L: Yes.

G: --along with a number of French officers. Could you clarify exactly what the mission of TRIM was?

L: Yes. The U.S. wanted to get in and train the Vietnamese army or armed forces, and the French had finally agreed to let us get in and

do that--they were very jealous of their position out there--as long as it was a joint, a combined effort. So General Ely was out there at the time in command of the French, and he and O'Daniel worked out something where he, as the French commander out there, asked O'Daniel to set up this organization. O'Daniel would do a combined one. They'd have a French chief of staff, an American deputy chief of staff. Then they had four divisions in TRIM: army, navy, air force--those were training missions--then they had one for pacification, which was still active and going on with the Vietnamese. So they had a pacification one, which was the operational end of things. Each one had a French or an American as chief of it and then the other nationality would be the deputy and then they were split down with membership one each. I was given the pacification division of TRIM, which was the operational one. Then there were pacification operations taking place and we did the training advice and the operational advice and so on on that that the Vietnamese would carry out. I had a French deputy, and then there were French officers there as well as Americans in it.

G: Were there problems in cooperation between the two?

L: Yes, there were. The French primarily staffed it with their intelligence people to keep track of me. They used to let me know that and I'd sit in there and they'd hide whatever they were writing on and I'd say, "Come on, what's this? A report on what I did last night?" And they'd say, "Yes." And he'd show me what he'd written so far.

But some of that, [there were] some real hard-core cases out there of--mostly airborne--but they'd been in the sixth section which is the military clandestine operation. Most of them had gotten into my pacification division. They were very much opposed to my getting in close to the Vietnamese until I talked to each of them individually and said, "You've been out here for years now and re-upped many times and stayed on longer than most, and I know that you've got a real deep feeling towards these Vietnamese. If you had your druthers to do something, what would you do to help them personally? What would you like to do? And if it's something that will fit in, I'll put you in charge of it."

So right away they started working with me. A real tough guy'd come up and say, "Oh, the kids out there, I'd like to work with the kids and help them. They need an education, they need this and that," and I'd say, "Fine. You're going to work with kids." And I'd fit them up with the Vietnamese to start working on things and they'd really pitch in, and they'd be about two weeks at that job and the French would immediately send them home.

G: Why would they do that?

L: Well, you know, to get them away.

G: They figured they'd sold out?

L: They'd sold out, yes. And a lot of them were telling me things. I finally went to General Ely and I said, "Your own staff and everything is lying to you here on some of these things, and I'll get some of the French to tell you some of the things that are going on, but

you'll have to protect them somehow or other." And I tried him with one, and the guy was immediately gouged, you see. Some of his own staff were in on this. So I said, "No, I can't do it anymore, but it's too bad." So anyhow, even Ely was using me on a lot of things to run joint U.S.-French committees looking into matters, patterned after that.

G: What was involved in pacification, exactly? What did you do?

L: Well, what happened was that at the time of Geneva and setting up two states there, we had a period in South Vietnam when we would be free allegedly of the North and have a chance to get ready for a plebiscite to come up to decide what the people [wanted]. I discovered that other than the French, the Vietnamese had very little civil service and weren't out in the provinces or districts except with a very low-grade personnel, clerks and not executive types at all that run anything. So the first thing that was needed was a government set-up of some sort that would be responsive to Saigon. Since there wasn't a civilian outfit that would have communication means or a strong directing force in Saigon, I thought the military would be the only way to do that. So we set up troops to go out and take over, first of all, the places where we knew there wasn't any Saigon-type of government at all for representation and where the communist side was withdrawing troops to go up to the North from their area.

So the first pacification was to send army in to take over. As the communist troops left, why, [we would] send in army troops who

would be able to set up a government as well a pro tem, temporary type of thing so we could get people trained on the civilian side to come in. Then there were some areas that were so militant, so anti-our side and so pro-communist, that we'd have to use military to go in and start a government in these places. So in essence, it was taking a supplementary-type of an army to begin with, one that had time on its own and some discipline and some sense of where Saigon was and so on, to set up a government that would start going throughout the countryside.

Incidentally, I got in all of the province chiefs, all of the district chiefs, most of whom were French who were leaving, and had the Vietnamese hold a meeting under President Diem and his secretary of defense and people at the palace working with them and made each man stand up and say what the conditions really were in his area. I said, "You're going to be leaving, so go ahead. This isn't going on your record in metropolitan France or anything. This is for real now, right now." And we graded each province from that publicly, and that was a wild meeting I'm telling you. It was an honest one. They got mad at each other and there were almost duels fought and so on and "You're a goddamn liar. I ran that place better than that." "The hell you did," you know, "You didn't know this." It'd go on, this type of thing going on. It was a very refreshing meeting. But we sat there for two days doing it.

In essence, what we were doing was making sure that the countryside would have police protection, have somebody to take over the

offices and so forth to run a province and run a district, and even the military type. Then we had to figure out a system of following up to when they were ready to change from the military over to the civilian, and we had a stage in between where both would run it for a time and gradually disengage the military side of it. We had two big operations of areas that were the last places where the communist Viet Minh were. That was down in the South and down to Ca Mau and so on. That was the first area. The second was the provinces in the center, Binh Duong and three provinces there from Danang south. These we ran pretty much from our office as the advisory group because I had it set up in the general staff of the Vietnam, ARVN, to run these and we'd come in as advisers.

Oddly enough, the Vietnamese didn't want to tell anything to the French on the thing. I had an awful time. The French swore that I put them up to it, and I was trying to get--hell, I don't like a lot of hard work. It's just laziness as much as anything else trying to get the French in to do something, because they really knew the country. And some of them had real feeling about trying to be decent to these people, but the Vietnamese wouldn't believe that. I remember once O'Daniel came in during the first operation down in Ca Mau, and the Vietnamese commander gave him completely fake plans because the French were along. O'Daniel had brought some friends and I finally had to whisper to O'Daniel, "Don't ask him questions in detail on this. I'll explain it all later. It isn't what they're going to do." It was a shame.

G: Was there much trouble with resistance when these new teams began to mobilize[?] the countryside?

L: Yes, there was at the first, but it was mostly a residual-type of resistance, war feelings over on. . . . The VC didn't come from those people at all. This first was a residual-type of thing along with stay-behinds who were told, "We're going to be leaving, but we'll be back. We're going to fight till. . . ." There were an awful lot of caches of arms and munitions and printing presses and what have you. They were cached behind. One of the things that we were doing was picking up an awful lot of that. We collected one hell of a lot of a big load of arms in these places. The enemy stayed behind down in Ca Mau; it's a coastal area that's very bad and later on some Americans were held prisoner down there. Nick Rowe[?] was one of them that was held there. We should have cleaned that out at the time, but we were rushing fast with limited troops and I was getting medical reports in that there were cases of cerebral malaria there, very dangerous. It was endemic in the region and it was a question of could we hold a battalion or two battalions over to go in there and sweep in there and see or not, and the commanders were yelling for them in other places and I finally told them to go ahead and forget it. It was called a forest.

G: Not the U Minh forest?

L: U Minh, yes. So I've been kicking myself ever since, you know, that that was an enemy stronghold. Except there wasn't anything there and

the health problems were terrible in there and this Father Wa[?] I was just talking to was down south of there eventually, and he used to cope with some of the troops they'd send down there.

G: Did you have much in the way of American staff at this time?

L: Yes, yes. One of them is here. I don't know whether he talked to you or not, he might have. Rufe Phillips was one of them who I put in charge of pacification, Rufe and a Filipino who had been on Magsaysay's staff in the Huk campaign, very brilliant guy. The Philippine government had sent him as an attache to Southeast Asia actually, to the Associated States and Thailand, Joe Banzon. Then I used to use Joe very unofficially. He was full of Magsaysay's methods and we had worked very closely for some years in the Philippines so this was very easy working together. Then there was another one I had then was Sam Karrick, U.S. Army colonel. He lives near here now. So does Rufe Phillips. I had a number of Americans fighting [?] with me. Actually I believed in only one American at a time in there living and working with the Vietnamese on a given thing so they wouldn't have a big mob of Americans around them. The Vietnamese were always the boss on these things. And on these operations, Rufe would be alone and he'd stay with the commander and they'd share the problems and so on, and he'd suggest some things and the commander would go and do it. But there wasn't the Americans running anything. I didn't believe in that. I wanted the Vietnamese to learn to do these things. We'd make the Vietnamese analyze what

L: Yes, yes.

G: Why did the French eventually disengage? Was that their initiative or somebody else's?

L: Well, that had been the thing from the very beginning. We had been trying to get the French to give independence to the Vietnamese, and they kept doing it in a way that always had ties to it, and they really had control of things. But there was a difference in the French relationship with them. There was a colonial office in Paris and there was a foreign affairs, state department-type of thing, and each of them had separate views on their relations with Indochina. So that the state department, the French foreign ministry, would agree with the U.S. on some things, but, by God, the colonial ministry didn't agree at all on that. They had been sort of the kings overseas, and they wanted it kept on that way. Eventually I think it was just economics that forced them out of it. The foreign ministry finally took over on the thing. I think, too, that was true of Diem. I've always wondered about why they picked Diem to come on out, and I think it was the foreign affairs ministry that picked him rather than the colonial ministry. So he came out with some strikes against him already amongst the French who were out there.

G: Well, he had a reputation as being very anti-French, didn't he?

L: Well, very independent, at least, and anti-French, yes. Separated from France. He wanted the empire pulled away from France.

G: Now, you've alluded to the fact that there was a lot of movement of people going on in the implementation of the Geneva Accords, and of course we know that there was a tremendous refugee problem involved there when hundreds of thousands of people came down from the North, for example. Was your office involved in that problem at all?

L: Originally, yes. I was one man with a very small staff helping me. I looked upon myself as being more an anti-communist than anything else. I was a cold war-type, and the others were being not cold war-types, they were just pro-U.S.-types trying to help this thing go. One of the things on the refugees that I saw when I was examining the papers that came out of the Geneva agreement, concords and so on, was that there'd be a tremendous population difference for the plebiscite when it was held. So I knew a lot of the people in the North wanted to come South, if it was easy to do, but we needed to move maybe two million. When I got to talking with our ambassador and others, they were talking about, oh, you know, the Red Cross can get maybe enough milk in here for two thousand people and so on. That's a big group. Diem was talking about that. Goddamn, would you please do something. This has got to be restricted, but I got Ambassador Heath to go. I said, "You speak French better than I do." I didn't speak it at all. "Come on, let's go over and see Diem." So I got to Diem. I said, "You've got to set up a way of handling refugees here. You need a refugee commissioner, and you need a plan to get them out so that they aren't spread like the

Palestine refugees and so on that we have big problems within the world today. We've got to get people down on the land and into productive lives again here." Heath was translating, and Diem said, "No, no, no." And I said, "Here, today, right now, you've got to make a commission of refugees and why don't you [get] the guy out in the hall, him." He was a friend of mine, see, Manny Phuoc.

G: What was the name again?

L: Phuoc. Ho Quan Phuoc.

G: Oh, yes.

L: He's a dentist. But I said, "Hey, Manny," and I called to him. He came in and so I said to him, "Tell him he's. . . . We'll help him out," you know, [inaudible] put together to start somehow or another and we've got a lot of planning to do. But Heath said, "Hey, Ed, I'm the ambassador here. I shouldn't be doing this; I'm not--" I said, "No, you're a friend of ours. Isn't he? He speaks English well enough, Diem, so he could do that." Diem says, "Wait a minute, I've talked to Phuoc," he said something to him in Vietnamese--I don't know what it was--"Goddamn you, get the hell away from here." (Laughter) So Manny wasn't made the refugee commissioner, but the assistant one, you see. But anyhow, I told the Ambassador, "That's all right, you're just here as a friend and everything and we don't report this in books, you see." But that's how we got it started. I said, "Goddamn, you've got to get at least two million people down there. You've got this plebiscite coming up and you've got to

have more votes than the other side because the other side's going to cheat like hell on this thing. You've got to at least have some people that want to vote the correct way, and if you safeguard the ballot boxes, why, maybe you can come out ahead on that thing."

So we left that and Ambassador Heath said, "What am I going to do?" And I said, "Well, you've got" --what's U.S. AID now-- "your economic mission in on this and they get a lot of it. But for running the American part of this thing, you've got a lot of military in here who aren't being used at all for anything. They're supposed to be training the Vietnamese army, but the French aren't willing. So why don't you get Iron Mike here to run some things?" Iron Mike said, "You son of a bitch." "No, come on, that's good." That's how Bill Rosson, who was one of Iron Mike's old hands, got in on the thing. So they figured I was sort of [inaudible]. When I got it finally organized and started out, I dropped out of it. I didn't have enough people to do that. That was true of a lot of things that I did out there. I'd start programs.

G: Did you have anybody at the ports up north where people were coming out of the--?

L: Yes, we had MAAG up there. I sent part of my team up there to help on the thing, because they were doing other things up there. I said this would help. And also, I helped the Vietnamese with psy. war to get the people. Actually, what I did on the psy. war part was to alert the people to what was coming by doing it ahead of time,

what the enemy actually did afterwards. This was sort of reminding "this is what life is going to be and this is the choice you're going to make." I sent out to all shopkeepers, you know, to make a list of all their goods and so forth by giving them a rate of the VC currency that was coming in and how much they'd lose by staying on and letting these guys take over and add them, get all reports ready for the enemy. The enemy tried to stop that, and later I found out that what we did through the Vietnamese looked so much like the enemy's work that they thought the enemy in town, the cadre that they had inside of Hanoi, were doing a French black operation. Think how furious, "That's our enemy doing that." They said, "No, this is the way the enemy would do things, you know," and I'd just gotten some cheap paper and mimeograph and we'd just put it on out.

G: Was one of your people up there Lou Conein, is that the way to pronounce it?

L: Yes, Conein was one.

G: I've heard a lot of stories about him. What kind of a character was he?

L: Conein is an old-timer. He came in in the OSS status from China and North Vietnam and then to Hanoi as a clandestine organizer and leader of guerrilla forces. He'd gotten in with some of the French and some of the Vietnamese who were anti-communist in those days. So he was a guy with the long-term memory of things and he was very close to the Foreign Legion and very close to some of the Vietnamese.

G: I heard he had been a member of the Foreign Legion at one time. Is that true?

L: Yes, that's what he says. I think so. At the least, he knew the Foreign Legion slang and their word and he was accepted by them and he was always hanging out with bars with them. When they withdrew from the North, I remember, he sent me some cars down from the North. I said, "Fine. Buy them, and I'll buy them to help out some of the people who are trying to get out, and we'll get some Citroens and so on down here." So the police came looking for them: "The Foreign Legion guys up in the North there killed a couple of people on the back seat of this Citroen that was down here in your name." "The sons of bitches, the Foreign Legion" and Conein had gotten the car and sent it down to hide it down there in Saigon and sent it in care of my name. So I just gave it up to the police.

G: That does put you in kind of a ticklish spot.

L: Yes. This is how close those guys were. I said, "What are you doing killing people up there?"

G: What kind of duties were Conein and his--if he had any help--[assigned] in the North besides aiding refugees?

L: Sabotage, mostly.

G: Sabotage?

L: Yes, yes.

G: Well, I'd heard that story and I wanted to verify it. Somebody said that he was putting sugar in gas tanks, but I'd heard it wasn't sugar, it was something else.

L: No, it was cutting in on transportation. All of these types of things I used to have to--he was full of ideas up there all the time. I'd check them out with the Ambassador. That was Collins at that time. Collins would have some things he'd want done, then some things we'd send to Washington and ask if you want this done or not and then start moving on it, certain things, and this transportation was one of them. It was fixing up coal and the railroads to blow up some engines and we went ahead and did that with plastic explosives and so on. Other things I couldn't [tell you]. Collins said, "Knock out their concrete plants." I said, "Jesus, that takes an awful lot of explosives and know-how for something that can be fixed up again real quick." So I didn't do that one, and he was mad at me for it. But things along that nature.

He [Conein] got in real trouble with the French on the things because there was a French admiral up there and his bedroom and their living room--where they were staying--were next to each other, and he could hear everything going on. So these guys got together and spun a quick[?] that they were going to blow up Haiphong Harbor. And the next thing I knew the French were after me, "You were planning on blowing up one of our best, finest harbors. We're still using that to evacuate." "Geez, I don't know what you're talking about." I had to call him down and raise hell with him on that. I said, "How do you blow up a harbor?" You know, these are guys with hand grenades and a few other things. They don't have the equipment like that.

G: We know, of course, that the Viet Minh had a stay-behind program, a very deep, clandestine kind of thing. Did we try anything similar to that?

L: Yes.

G: We did?

L: Yes.

G: How did that work out?

L: Well, all countries involved there--and that includes the Brits--had stay-behind nets that they'd left behind. Most of them were just plain intelligence nets. The CIA had nets, the French had nets, almost all of them were rolled up almost immediately after the Viet Minh took over. I had two nets up in there that I put in that the Vietnamese themselves wanted to put on. "Will you please help us on this thing and show us how to do it?" Which I did. And they stayed on there until years later; I guess the CIA had taken them over when I left. I wasn't doing anything permanently there, turning over anything to any Americans who were going to stay on. They were still going, and the CIA said, "Well, they've probably turned, and the enemy's probably operating them now." And I said, "No, no, the training and everything, this is all protected up here in the transmission." So they called some people down South, and I said, "If you do that how are you going to get them into the North again?" They got them South and then discovered that they hadn't been turned at all and they still were good, and they couldn't get them back.

G: The population control was too good in the North, was that the problem?

L: Among other things. But we had things, we had some funds and [inaudible] equipment and weapons and so on, supplies up there.

G: Were there any thoughts about perhaps organizing a resistance in the North?

L: Yes, yes. Originally, I went up at the start of the pullout of the North, and all the Vietnamese troops who had been fighting with the French were told to go home. All of them said, "We'll have to fight our way home first of all. When we get there, we're going to be constantly attacked, so how do we keep alive?"

G: Who took that over from you?

L: CIA in part and the army in part.

G: Who provided the training for these teams? Surely you needed some kind of logistic support. . . .

L: CIA did.

G: CIA provided that?

L: Hell, we brought a lot of them through Saigon from down in there[?]. And they were being watched very carefully and I told CIA, "If you get a ship in here somehow or another, I'll get them in." The CIA came to me after they'd done that and said, "Well, the ship's waiting and everything, they're ready to sail," and I said, "Tell them to go ahead." And they said, "When are you going to bring your people?" and I said, "They're there now." But we got them all in, and they'd been watching. The guy was down on the ship and he'd seen these guys come aboard. I know the enemy was watching, and we did it very clandestinely and very expertly and got them off. I don't know what they told them, but Conein was very good at that and some of the others with me were. . . .

G: Can you tell me where they were trained? Were they trained in country or were they sent out of country?

L: Sent out.

G: Sent out?

L: Sent out, yes. On islands offshore, and very secretly.

G: There's a question raised in your book that I've heard some speculation on, and that was about a local leader who you apparently had good relations with called Trinh Minh The. I don't want you to necessarily repeat the whole story, but it seems to me there's some mystery surrounding the circumstances of his death. Have you learned anything since that time about that?

L: No.

G: Who do you think killed him?

L: I thought the French had. I thought a group of French had. This sixth section--might have been the fifth section. In the Vietnamese army, which is set up as a counterpart of France, the fifth section was psychological operations and the sixth was clandestine operations, but I think in the French the fifth section was their clandestine operations, military types.

G: Why did you think the French had done this? Did you have any evidence or was this just--?

L: He had killed one of their generals, and he was still fighting them when I went up to see him and he had French prisoners. This broke me up with my TRIM section. My deputy at TRIM was so angry with me, "I hear you've been up with our enemy, Trinh Minh The, a foul son of a bitch like that," you know, really furious. I said, "He's

Vietnamese and he's anti-communist." "Yeah, but he's anti-French. He's killing our people." I said, "Yes, I'm getting your people being taken prisoners and being released to me among other things," which I did. "But, Jesus," he said, "he's scum of the earth; he kills our generals." I said, "Yes, that's his theory. You kill the leader who gives the orders."

G: Of course the Viet Minh were trying to kill generals, too.

L: But Trinh Minh The actually was that way.

G: Can you talk a little bit about the assistance that the Philippines provided to Diem about this time?

L: Well, it was very informal. The first assistance was in their attache over there who had been on Magasaysay's staff and who was very good at counter-guerrilla types of things and turning armed forces around into doing civic action and so on.

G: Was this the man whose name you'd mentioned previously?

L: Yes, that's right.

G: Joe Banzon?

L: Joe Banzon, B-A-N-Z-O-N.

G: Right, right.

L: His going over as an attache. He and I were very close friends, and he came and he said, "Really, I just want to work with you and help out some things and we do it like the old days, you know." And I said, "Okay." Then there were problems with security of the presidential palace and I remember that Diem told me, "The army's

going to attack here in a coup and want to take over the palace. Will you please talk to my palace guard on the thing?" So I talked to them, and they didn't have a goddamn thing to stop anything the army had drawn there. So they were telling me what they needed to protect the place, and they needed a lot of artillery among other things. I said, "We don't have the artillery. We're going to have to get it from the army and the army's going to use it against you instead." I said, "Now, they're coming up with some armor and the armor's over here. Here's what I'd do if I were you." And I was giving him all sorts of things to do to stop armor, to block streets, to get trucks and block streets and whatnot, and buy some time so that he could maybe either bug out of the palace or something. So came the day when it was scheduled to go and I went over and worked on the army and actually broke it up from inside.

G: Who was plotting the coup? Was that [Nyugen Van] Hinh at that time?

L: General Hinh and some of his cohorts. I invited his cohorts to come over to the Philippines real fast and get over to the Philippines. And they came. I borrowed a plane from O'Daniel and they got to the Philippines. These guys didn't have passports or visas or anything. So I talked the Philippines into letting them in to the country because they were with me, and then got Magsaysay and said, "Geez, help me out. I'm in a spot." Which he did, and he said, "I've got some suites down at the Manila Hotel. I'll put them up as my guest there. " I didn't know the President had that. I said, "Yes, do

that." So he promptly set out a course for them[?]. One of my people stayed behind then, Joe Redick, who lives near here. But we kept them and when Hinh went to have his coup, he suddenly discovered all of his key people--three were going to run the thing and this guy was going to do the other. He'd let them all go and he figured, "Geez, I should have gone. No one had invited me to go; I should have gone." That was funny.

So anyhow, I went. They were supposed to attack one morning and the Ambassador said, "Ed, you can go down there to see if he's all right and get him out"--meaning Diem--"at the palace. If they come to attack, I don't want you anywhere near. I heard you had a radio put in there for him to keep in touch with his units elsewhere in the country, and I don't want you down at that set running a war, see?" I said, "No, sir, I won't." So I went down to see Diem, and Diem was working there in the palace. No guards, empty. I said, "Where are all your guards?" He said, "I don't know. They're here someplace; they're supposed to be working." I said, "This is the day you're supposed to be attacked." "Oh?" I said, "Show me a guard." So we went out and they were all bugged out, two or three battalions of them. I said, "Geez, I must have been too realistic yesterday in telling them how to fight barehanded against an army." Sure enough that's what it was.

So I said, "You're going to need something better than that in there. The only person that I know of who's any good at guarding

got there in 1965 again, Xuan was sitting on a front porch in his pajamas on a main road and would run out and start to direct traffic and so forth. At the time I used to duck, because he would see me, you know, my buddy-buddy and--

G: Do you think there's anything to the rumors that Xuan was the one who was responsible for the murders of Diem and [Ngo Dinh] Nhu in 1963?

L: I don't think so.

G: You don't think so?

L: I don't think so.

G: Who do you think did it? Do you have any idea?

L: I really don't. This is something else I have to find out. I've been trying to find out for years. I know who's got the answers, but the sons of bitches won't tell me.

G: Everybody I ask gives me a different name.

L: I know two Americans who know what happened.

G: Will you tell me who they are?

L: Sure. One of them's [Henry] Cabot Lodge who swears up and down not. And the other's Lou Conein, who swears up and down not. But I got them both together out there. I'd gotten Lou very drunk one night. He was crying, he was on his knees hanging on to me, begging my forgiveness. "All right, Ed, this has gotten this far, now, what's the name of the guy that did it?" And he wouldn't tell me all of a sudden. So in the morning with his hangover--it was a Sunday--I took him down, and Cabot Lodge was the ambassador. I said, "Here's

presidential palaces--nobody in the U.S. knows a goddamn thing about that, even the Secret Service there doesn't know. I know a guy who knows how to run security against the communist enemy who would come in battalion strength and larger. I'll see if I can get him. I'll have to borrow him from Magsaysay; he's his aide now in the presidential palace there." So I got Valeriano over there, Napoleon Valeriano. So he came in and trained the presidential guard in the place, and he took some of the officers back to the Philippines and trained them in the way they set up their guard system and palace there.

G: Who paid for this? This sounds kind of expensive.

L: The Philippines paid.

G: They did?

L: I don't know. That's for these[?] people. Most of it, once in a while, some of these things, there's very few of them, either the Vietnamese would pay for it or they might have paid for it. Valeriano stayed with me. We were running flights from Clark over to there so the air was always easy to get in. Pan American wasn't charging too much on flights. The Vietnamese were paying. The CIA would pick up some of it, you know, if I couldn't find anybody else. They were very helpful on that.

G: Did you also help set up any of the Vietnamese internal security forces?

L: Yes.

G: There's one character that is kind of a shadowy guy but he plays a role occasionally in later Vietnamese history and that was a man named Mai Huu Xuan.

L: Yes.

G: Did you know him?

L: Yes. Mai Huu Xuan was introduced to me by President Diem who told Xuan that he wanted Xuan to get some help from me. Xuan didn't want me anywhere near any of their--

G: Really?

L: I was a foreigner. That's the thing. He was very Vietnamese. He was very anti-French at the time. He'd been in the Surete and the French had broken with him and he was worried about his family, his wife and children, that they were going to come through and try and get them.

G: Who was he afraid might try to do this?

L: The Surete, mostly, of France. And the French were talking that way, too. So I arranged ways of getting some help to his family and protection for them, and he then started telling me what he had in the way of resources, which surprised me. He had plenty. And I got him in touch with Americans who could help him with some of that and some of the special intelligence stuff, and I got the army in to help with that. Some of them were clandestine-type of operations that I'd asked CIA to help with, and put him in touch with them. He started opening up to me when he wanted to meet me secretly and the French were after him and so on, and I said, "All right, come up the alley behind my house." He kept saying, "Yes, but they're watching that," and I said, "Come on up. I'll make a date with you tomorrow."

So just as he started up the alley, I was right there, I said, "Come here." I had rented a little cottage, a former garage in the back of--there weren't any French watching that section on the right. And he said, "Goddamn, all right, I'll work with you." That impressed him, you know, that we were all ready. He said, "I thought you were just wide open to these people." I said, "No, we're very alert to what's going on in this neighborhood." I said, "Not only that, most of my neighbors are in on security" which they were voluntarily. That was a strange night. My whole neighborhood there was Vietnamese who had just declared that they were friends. (Interruption)

G: Let me get that. You say that Xuan went crazy?

L: Yes. Something became mentally unbalanced after I left there, and I don't know, I suspect this was probably the real reason, there was an onset of it, or something, because initially Diem used him for the first organizing work of the new cadre down in the South. The ones who became the VC were going on and we wanted to clear a zone where they were hiding out and organizing. I told him to use police and military and civilians in there from the civic action teams. They were called that but they were pacification. He put Xuan in charge of the thing. So originally he was very trusting of Xuan, but something happened after I left. Xuan started going up and I started hearing that he'd gotten in bad on some things and all I could figure out was that mentally he was gone. I know when I

the two of you. Now you owe me something. You're going to tell me." And Lodge turned right around and he had a file back of his desk. He pulled it up right away and got out a file, and he started reading me something about his last message, he said, to Diem. This was all he knew about it, he said, "And this is from me to the President." I said, "Let me see that, let's see [inaudible]." He wouldn't show it to me, and he said, "That's hearsay[?]. I had nothing to do with it." And Lou said, "That's right, he had nothing to do with it. I had nothing to do with it." (Laughter)

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]