INTERVIEW II

DATE: March 16, 1981

INTERVIEWEE: GENERAL SAMUEL T. WILLIAMS

INTERVIEWER: TED GITTINGER

PLACE: General Williams' home in San Antonio, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: All right, General Williams, despite the increase in terrorist activities in 1959 and 1960, did you see cause for optimism in the South Vietnamese situation in your last two years on your tour?

W: I was not necessarily optimistic, but I certainly was not pessimistic. I thought that the situation was under control and that it could be kept under control, because I had a great deal of faith in the people that I was working with, especially U.S. military advisors, both officers and NCO's being furnished me. I had a great deal of faith in the Vietnamese leadership in the form of President [Ngo Dinh] Diem and his secretary of defense, his various secretaries of state and so forth. And I thought that they would come out of it, that they would come out of it in time.

G: I think, in fact, you said in a letter to Senator [Mike] Mansfield that you thought after 1960 South Vietnam might even be able to reduce its defense budget. But in 1964--and I'm referring again to the interview that you gave to the U. S. News and World Report--you said that when you left Vietnam in September of 1960, that the situation bordered on the critical due to a loss of good relations

between USOM [United States Operations Mission], the embassy, on one hand and Diem on the other hand. In what sense was the situation critical when you left?

W: Well, I don't know exactly how to explain that to you. To me, it was critical because there was not good relationship between the presidency and the Americans in general in Vietnam with MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] excepted. The President was making complaints about the Ambassador personally; he was making complaints about the CIA; he was making complaints about USOM. On the other hand, the people at the embassy, the people in USOM--I'm talking about the leaders of those people, not the Indians doing the work, but the leaders--were making complaints about the presidency and about any other government official whose name happened to come up, and in my opinion, the situation was such that if there was not some change made, that it could become severely critical. And I was right in that, because it did become--

G: Can we take those a little in detail? Now you saw that Diem was complaining about the mission and about the CIA, for example. What sort of complaints was he making?

W: Well, he was complaining because USOM would not do anything about helping them with a Civil Guard. That's one thing. Any project that he wanted to carry out, such as resettling people and things of that nature, they would buck him on it. For instance, he wanted to take people out of the Delta where they were packed in as tight as they could be, and put those people up in the Highlands on farms.

Farming was what they were doing down in the Delta. And personally, I thought it was right. I thought if he could settle that Highland area with good substantial Vietnamese and each man own his own land, that it would be a good bulwark against communist inroads. His idea was that every man, every head of family, that went up there was going to have two or three hundred acres, and the government was going to sell him that land and give him either six or seven years to pay for it. I couldn't think of anything better. USOM said no. If they moved anyone up there they had to move them up and put them on the outskirts of any cities that were there, in other words, merely enlarge the cities. Well, Diem's reply to counter that was, that's just making larger cities up there; it's not cultivating the countryside nor it's not sowing a good yeomanry through the country. Those kind of things.

Some of the villages he started to build in the Delta area. There was a tax on those people to help build the villages. He asked me one time what I thought about people down there that couldn't pay their tax. I asked, could they work? And he said yes, and I said all right, will you consider this: why can't a man work out his tax? I said, as a child in Denton, Texas in the United States of America, they had road taxes, and I presume they still do. But in my day and time, if people didn't have cash money handy, and the county had some roads to build, a man and his team of horses or mules and scraper or wagon would come, and they would work under county supervision and build roads. I said there was

nothing degrading about that; a man was working out his taxes. I said, hell, everybody did it. All right, now he started to apply that to the Delta area. Immediately he was accused by embassy and USOM of using slave labor.

G: Were these the agrovilles?

W: That's right, the agrovilles, I think that was the name. They said, look, Diem's trying to do this with slave labor. I said what the hell's slavery about it? A man's working out his taxes. If he has money, he doesn't have to do that if he doesn't want to. He can work or he can pay his taxes with money. He can do either one he wants to do. Diem put out an ordinance ruling or dictating, or whatever the proper term is, that no person could own over two hundred and fifty acres of land. There were some people, some Vietnamese, that owned large estates--two and three thousand acres--and they used Vietnamese farmers to farm that land as sharecroppers. But the farmer's share was very small. American sharecroppers wouldn't put up with that. I'd seen sharecroppers in the United States as a child, and had observed them, and after I got grown realized they were getting the short end of the stick.

Well, immediately the large landowners--a man owning two or three thousand acres of land--looked with a dim view on the government taking all of his land except two hundred and fifty acres, although he was reimbursed for what the government took. He looked with a dim view on that, because then he would shortly in years to

come, or his family, would fail to be millionaires or multi-millionaires, and be ordinary, moderate citizens.

G: Were these larger estates primarily Delta estates?

W: They were, yes. Now, Diem would be opposed in anything like that that he brought up. It didn't make any difference what it was, someone would up and say, "Well, that little son of a bitch can't do this."

G: Is that the term that they used?

W: That was the term they often use. And I objected to that very strongly. I said, "Don't you know"--speaking to these senior U.S. people in the country team meeting--"that using language like that is going to leak and get back to the President of this country and to his various and sundry people, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and so on and so forth." "Oh, no, no one's going to repeat anything like that." And I said, "The hell they won't. You can believe it, and on top of that, what good does it do to always be abusing a person? It's going to cost you money, it's going to cost you prestige. It's going to cost you the ability to work. . . ." I was totally disregarded; they kept on doing that. That irritated me terribly because first of all, I thought a great deal of President Diem; I thought that he was doing a good job, as good as he could possibly do. And I thought that our purpose was to give him as much help as possible, and if we thought he was going wrong in this or that to nudge him politely to get him to change ideas instead of saying flatly "you can't do this" or "you can't do that."

G: Who, primarily, would you say were the chief offenders in this way, in the USOM?

W: I'd say it'd have to be the chief, because I think most take their line of conduct from their chief. All Indians in USOM were not anti-Diem.

G: So you think Ambassador [Elbridge] Durbrow, for example.

W: Well, as far as the embassy was concerned, certainly it was the Ambassador as he is responsible for the embassy and his staff.

G: I'll ask a question about him a little later, but we can get into that. So you felt that relationships were what was critical?

W: Yes.

G: In 1960. Not the security situation, necessarily?

W: No, I thought that mainly the critical situation revolved around the relationship between the American civilian officialdom in Vietnam and the Vietnamese officials.

You see, another thing that convinced me of that--I was having no trouble, my officers were having no trouble with our Vietnamese counterparts in army, navy or air force. We had our differences, we had our arguments, but nothing to cause a person to be mad about it five minutes after the conversation ended.

G: That reminds me of something you mentioned last time, which was that your relationship with the senior officers was so good, they were so open with you, that when talk of a coup would come up, they had no hesitation about discussing this in front of you, and you were able to influence them to go along this line.

W: That is correct.

G: But it occurs to me that we didn't mention what was behind such talk. Why would they be discussing a coup at all, what was their reason?

W: I was never too sure about that, but some times there was talk of coup, around campfires and there was a lot of it on the radio, international radio. They would say, "Well, Hanoi Radio says such and such. French Radio says such and such." I don't know whether they ever quoted American radio, Voice of America or anything like that. I don't remember that. I think those broadcasts instigated, and on top of that, you want to remember that the officer corps was primarily French oriented--they were Vietnamese second. The senior officers had served in the French army, either in the Colonial army or in the Regular army. They were educated by the French, if they had any education. And the French didn't like Diem. He had literally thrown them out of the country. Just a lot of French-oriented people were talking against the Vietnamese government.

On top of that, they were rather young and what else did they have to do if they couldn't do other things but sit around the campfire and bitch about something. I've seen the same thing in the American army, except I haven't heard anyone in the American army sit around and bitch about having a coup d'etat. But they bitched about the CG, they bitched about the commissary, they bitched about supply, they bitched about the Adjutant General, and you name it, and the American army officers will sit around and

bitch about it. Nothing serious, you understand. Well, they were doing the same thing, except these generals and colonels were mostly younger--they were younger than the average colonel in the American army at that time.

G: And these were the top-ranking Vietnamese officers.

W: They were the top-ranking, yes.

For instance, Big [Duong Van] Minh who later became the instigator of the coup d'etat--the man who had Diem murdered--he'd been a first lieutenant in the French army, colonial army. Don, who was next to Minh--

G: Is this Tran Van Don?

W: Yes. He'd been lieutenant or captain in the French army. Tran Van Don had been aide-de-camp to Emperor Bao Dai. You could go right down the line. Some of them had been born in France, some of them had been educated in France. Some of them had merely been with the French army. General Ty, who was the oldest and a senior, and very likely the least efficient of all, had been a sergeant in the Colonial army and had even gone to World War I in a truck transportation corps. I ran into them in World War I on one occasion. We called them at that time, solder vernacular, I don't know what the correct name is, we called them Annamite. I remember one time that I was sent to find one of the battalions in my regiment that had failed to get where they were to go, and I ran into one of these truck companies, and there was one of these what I now know to have been a Vietnamese officer in the leading truck. When I

talked to him, he couldn't understand me, but he asked me what kind of insignia was painted on the door of the trucks of the convoy that our soldiers were riding in. He showed me some dragon or some damn thing like that that was painted on the door of his truck. Well, I didn't know, but if I'd known that, he could have told me where that column of trucks were, presumably.

But old General Ty had been a sergeant in France in that outfit. He came back and was an officer in the Vietnamese army under the French at the time that the Japanese came in. When he found out--he told me he was a battalion commander by that time--that the Japanese were really fixing to take over from the Vichy French and not collaborate with them like they had heretofore, he warned his battalion. He said they were out in a field at the time. He told his troops such and such is going to happen, and said, "I think now it's every man for himself. I'm going to the jungle." He told me he took off, and said his whole damn battalion just disappeared.

When the French got back, after Great Britain and the United States gave Vietnam back to the French after World War II, Ty came out of hiding, Big Minh came out of hiding, the rest of them who had been hiding came out. Big Minh was arrested, put in jail, and the French were going to court-martial him, but they didn't probably because of his association with a man who later became vice president, a man by the name of [Nguyen Ngoc] Tho, T-H-O.

Big Minh told me about being in the French prison, and the way he described it, it was terrible. He said they were packed in there in what later became known in our literature as tiger cages, and he said he couldn't sit down or lie down. It was crowded in there, and [he] said there was no place to defecate. He said there was urine and feces on the floor ankle deep when he was finally gotten out. I said, "How the hell did you get out?" He said, "Mr. Tho got out, and after he got out, he got me out." The French still held desertion over him, though. They threatened to court-martial him, but they didn't.

Now that was the type background of some of these people. Each one of them had a different background, and that's the reason they couldn't be taken as a group. You had to know each one as well as you could and figure him out. Now with Major General [Huu] Xuan, X-U-A-N, that led the detail that went down to the church in Cholon to get Diem and his brother and bring them back after they had surrendered by phone. He'd been in the French G-2. And at one time when I commented about this officer and asked Diem why he didn't give him more responsibility, Diem apparently had a gut feeling this man was no good, and it turned out he wasn't. Diem told me, "That man was a G-2, French army." And added, "Once a G-2 in the French army, always a G-2 in the French Army." Well, what he referred to was the Intelligence Section.

So they had all kinds of backgrounds, and you ask, now what would cause them to do this? Maybe boredom? If nothing else, maybe

just to see what my reaction would be. I don't know.

G: Now, some authorities say that one of the sources of disagreement in this area involving the embassy was that the embassy believed generally that Diem's problems, wherever they may have been in the country, resulted from his gradual loss of political clout, of authority, that he was alienating too many people in the country, and they advocated therefore certain reforms which Diem didn't want to carry out, and that the military argued that making Diem act against his will would cause him to lose face and only aggravate the situation. Do you recall an argument along those lines?

W: At the moment I can't say that I do. It doesn't sound mysterious to me because the whole thing began to turn into a can of worms, there's no doubt about that. But what they were referring to as the reforms, I haven't any idea. It sounded like a lot of hindsight talking to me.

G: Did you have any specific advice to Diem about how to handle the insurgency, for example? What were your ideas on what was behind the growing acts of terror in the countryside?

W: I certainly had advice to him about handling the insurgency. What was behind it was nothing to me except a bunch of people that were reds, communists, that were just attempting to take over the country. That's all there was to it.

G: But where were they coming from? Were these infiltrated communists, do you think, or had they been left behind from before?

W: I thought and still believe the hard core of them, the leaders, were from the North.

When the North and the South divided, we know that almost a million people came down from the North to the South, and General Mike O'Daniel honchoed most of that.

G: Yes, we talked about that last time.

W: That's right.

There were certain numbers of them, but very few, that left the South and went North. Now, one group of those people, several hundred and I don't know exactly how many--I say several hundred because that's the figure I have in my mind--were stopped short of the border and were held by the North Vietnamese for several months. And all the young men in that group then were married to Vietnamese girls that lived in that vicinity. Now, when they went ahead and moved on further north, the husbands went but the girls were not allowed to go. So that put these young men who had been born and raised in the South but had sympathy toward the communists, moving up into the North, but their wives and any children that were coming on were living back down South. Well, now this might seem far-fetched, but to me it wasn't far-fetched at all when that was told to me, because knowing the tremendous loyalty in the Vietnamese family which comes first--the family comes first, the State second, then the Church about third--but the family comes first of all. Those men were going to come back to the South to get their wives and their children. That gave them a perfect bed

to come back to and an area to come back to after being thoroughly indoctrinated in the North and then to spread from there out throughout the country.

G: Now, if I read you right, what you're saying is that these men, and men like them, formed the cadre who organized and directed the insurgency. Am I reading you properly on this?

W: That's right.

G: Now, most authorities would agree with that, I think. Most of the people that I have read would certainly agree with it. Where they disagree some time is where did the followers come from and what motivated the followers that these cadre organized and got together? What is your opinion about that?

W: I think it's not too big a question. First of all, this thing that I just related here, of course I had no personal knowledge of that, that was merely told me by the Vietnamese how they kept those people there for a while and married and then they took the men on and left their wives and families back. That of course came to me just by hearsay.

Now, where did the followers come from? It's not too hard to understand. Your hard-core Viet Cong came down from the North, and they'd start prying around these villages, and they would try to get help from the villages because they had to have food, they had to have money support, they had to have places to hide and so on and so forth. Now, they would come into a village that was just as innocent, more so, than a little town in Texas or Louisiana and

they'd say, "All right, we want help. We want assistance. We want food, we want a place to hide, we want money, we want some piasters" and so on and so forth. People would say, "Nothing doing." And they'd say "Fine." And later they'd come back at night, they'd pick out the head man, what we would call the mayor, his wife and then his children, and when the people got up the next morning, there would be a stake or something of that nature standing up in the main street of the town, and there would be the mayor's head on it, his body down at the bottom of it, and very likely his wife's body also. If she was pregnant, she'd be gutted, her baby out, and by that time maybe the hogs had started working on them.

Now, just a few things like that, and you've got some innocent farmers that don't know very much, except how to work in a rice field, and the next time some man comes in and he says, "I want some piasters, I want a place to hide, and I want you to do this, that and the other," they're going to hesitate a hell of a long time before they say, "No, no way." I hate to think it could happen here, but I tell you, I believe that a small town in the United States could be intimidated, some town, just as well as you could intimidate some villages in Vietnam. They had no communication, there's few telephone lines, the roads were very poor. If anyone went from one place to another, they walked, or they rode a bicycle. Yes, those things could happen, and in that way a man, an outfit could build up a very good following.

Now, I know that these things, the instances like this did happen. We'll take a Civil Guard detachment that's out here guarding a bridge, or something of that nature. I relate this as positive facts of things that happened. Maybe a half dozen Viet Cong would come, and tell these guards, "we want you to surrender." It'd be always in the night, see. And they'd say, "No, we won't surrender." Remember they are around the bridge or around a little old building that they're guarding or something of that nature, and their wives and their children are living there in little shacks, and I'm talking about really shacks, something you can throw up in fifteen minutes. They're carrying old 1898 French rifles, and the ammunition for it will fire and some of it won't. They said, "No, we won't surrender." Maybe they've got a corporal or a sergeant in charge. Hadn't as much training as a good Boy Scout in the United States.

The V.C. come back the next night, they stop at the nearest village, they round up all the villagers. Say there's a hundred villagers. They put them in a column of two's and march them down the road. They don't march them up close to this little fort. They'll march them up within a hundred yards of it maybe, it's dark. They order, halt, start shouting and hollering. They do. The Viet Cong goes back to this little outpost and says, "You're completely surrounded. I've got two or three hundred troops here. We're going to put you to the sword, we're going to kill you and your women and children if you don't surrender now. Are

you going to surrender or not surrender?" And the guards say, "Boy, come on in."

Now, those things happened repeatedly. I used to complain about that and wanting to do something with the Civil Guard and give them some kind of training and equipment. I said, it's beyond this argument about who is going to train the Civil Guard. Someone's got to train them, someone's got to equip them, someone's got to organize them, because incidents like this happen, and I related instances of that nature. I was able to say this happened at such-and-such a place at such-and-such an hour on such-and-such a night. I'd have the information right at my fingertips, and today I'm talking in generalities, and I don't have details of times and places. I'd say, now as soon as that happened, these V.C. can go back to their villages and say, "Look, you think the government of Vietnam is defending you? Look what we just did. We just knocked off this outfit up here on this bridge, we just knocked off this outfit over here on this radio station." And I said the natives will believe it. "They're not knocking them off, they're using their own Vietnamese villagers to do it under the cover of darkness." So that's actually digging the foundation right out from under the Vietnamese government. Our officials couldn't see it, or didn't want to see it. Or simply were afraid to face facts.

G: What was their explanation?

W: None.

G: They just didn't accept your explanation.

W: Didn't accept it. Often claimed I'd been misinformed.

G: So terror was a very effective weapon?

W: Very effective. And not only they didn't accept it, but I had long since started working through the Vietnamese military to have them give me a report, as well as they could, of any time any incident of this type that I have just discussed happened. Say, once a week I'd take a consolidated report like that and I'd take it to a country team meeting, and I'd say "All right, now, here's the information I have as to what terrorist activities have happened during the last seven days, which we're not doing anything about and we're keeping the Vietnamese from doing anything about," and I'd read the report. They wouldn't accept them. They'd say, "Let us have that data, and we'll check it through our sources." They'd come back a week or fourteen days later and they'd say, "Our sources don't jibe with yours."

G: What were their sources, do you have any idea?

W: No. And I'd say, "Well, why do you think the Vietnamese military gave me reports like this?" They'd say, "They're trying to pull the wool over your eyes. They're doing that to get more military aid." I said, "They're not getting any military aid at all for the Civil Guard or Self-Defense Corps. This has nothing to do with military aid. This is what's going on in the countryside that the army has no control over, and no one else has any control over because the Civil Guard's supposed to be sitting on these places." I was just hitting a stone wall.

G: Were your people, your American people in the field corroborating some of these stories?

W: Oh, yes. However, they couldn't corroborate all of them, because maybe there wouldn't be an American within miles of one of these places.

G: Some people say that in addition to terror, the Viet Cong had another ace in the hole, and that was the business of land reform. You've touched on land reform already, you mentioned Diem's program. Some of Diem's critics say that the problem is that Diem didn't follow through on the land reform program, that is, that there was a program, all right, but that not nearly enough land actually changed hands. Not enough landless peasants wound up with some land. Did you have any insight into that?

W: I wouldn't know about numbers.

G: It wasn't your business to check on that?

W: No. The only thing I would know about that would be in the conversation with Diem he might casually mention, "Well, we've settled so many people at such-and-such a place or in such-and-such an area." But, you see, so many times when Diem would bring up a thing like that you just spoke about, I'd caution him by saying, "Mr. President, you know I have great sympathy with what you're doing, but I have no control over those things. I have none whatsoever," and I said, "Odd as it may seem to you, that's entirely the civilian, American civilians are handling that business, and anytime I even bring up

the subject, they often take offense that I am bold enough to bring it up."

G: Why would they take offense?

W: Because they'd say it was none of my business.

G: I see. So why was Diem bringing it up to you, then? He was a smart man, he knew you couldn't do anything, I suspect. Why?

W: I don't know, unless he knew that I was trying to get those things back to report through military channels, which I would, and he very likely knew that I was trying to defend him before the other Americans. Those people were pretty smart; I think they knew what was going on. I'm not so awful sure that there weren't American civilians that would tell Diem, or if not Diem but members of the Vietnamese government, many things that--in other words, I don't believe that all people in USOM were in sympathy with what USOM was doing. I'm not so awful sure that all people in the embassy were in sympathy with what the ambassador wanted to do. I'm not sure of that.

G: We've mentioned a lot about Diem. Do you have any recollections or any opinions to share with us about his brother, [Ngu Dinh] Nhu? We hear an awful lot about him after 1960, that he was sort of the real bad guy--

W: He was the man that wore the black hat to hear the Americans tell it. My relationship with Nhu was very, very scant. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak French. Certainly not enough to carry on a conversation with him. I had very, very little contact

with him--some, not much. I must say I had more contact with Mrs. Nhu, and that was very limited, than I did with Mr. Nhu. But a certain group of Americans considered Nhu as the black-hatted guy, and they objected to the political party that he organized--

G: That was the Can Lao, wasn't it?

W: That's right. Can Lao? Yes, as I recall that was the name of it. And I don't know whether that was a labor union, or if it was anti-labor union or exactly what it was, but it was a political party that the President did not belong to because I asked him flat out. I asked, "Are you a member of the Can Lao Party?" He said, "I am not, and I have nothing to do with it." He said, "My brother is with the Can Lao Party." He may have been the dastardly villain that the Americans, some Americans, made him out to be, but I doubt it. Neither do I think Madame Nhu was the dragon lady that she was painted to be, not by any manner or means.

G: She became rather famous for making certain statements to the press later on, and the one that sticks in my mind at this time for some reason is that after 1963, she went on record as saying that the Americans were to blame for it all. Somehow, it was all our fault. How did that strike you, when she said that?

W: Well, first of all, I wasn't so awful sure she said that, if she was correctly quoted. Was this after Diem and her husband were murdered? I'd like to go back just a little bit.

G: All right.

W: Madame Nhu spoke English, and she was a very, very attractive woman, and a lot of people were mesmerized by her beauty. I wasn't because I was totally indifferent to her, and why I don't know, but I just was. I engaged her in conversation, she engaged me in conversation, and she used to take me to task for things, occasionally. For instance, I remember one time she invited me to a house party she and Mr. Nhu were having down on the coast, and I declined.

G: Was this in Saigon?

W: No, the house party was down on the coast someplace. I declined and later the President invited me to the same party, and I accepted. And the first time she saw me, which was at the party, she said, "I invited you to this party and you declined, and the President invited you and you accepted." I said, "Well, what the hell do you expect me to do?" (Laughter) "Of course I accepted when the President invited me. That didn't mean I wanted to come." But nevertheless, we'd have arguments like that.

But now I'm really drawing on my imagination, because there's several things I told the President that he did long after I was gone that may have been good and may not have been. I told him one time that I thought he should send someone to the United States to give the Vietnamese side, his side of the problems that were going on. And I said, "Someone who's thoroughly familiar with them." All right, he sent Madame Nhu. She got over here and the press started tearing her to pieces. I think maybe--now this may be egotism on my part, but I'm not too sure it is--I think maybe

Madame Nhu came to the United States because I told the President he should send someone over here to give his side of the problem. Now, Madame Nhu's father was the ambassador to the United States, and they were at cross-purposes.

G: Do you know why?

W: Well, her father was anti-Diem, and I think he was pro-Bao Dai, but I'm not positive. But I know that they were at cross-purposes, and I know that that worked out to her disadvantage, and actually to serious disadvantage, because when she went to various and sundry places, and the bills at those various and sundry hotels were sent to the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, which is common custom, the way it's done throughout the world, they were not paid. So the American press didn't come back and say the Vietnamese ambassador refused to pay Madame Nhu's bills, they came back and said, Madame Nhu jumped a hotel bill in Los Angeles. I read that in the press myself. Well, hell, that woman's as honest as I am, she wouldn't jump a hotel bill. Then she was painted as the dragon lady and all that kind of stuff, which was terrible. Among other things she organized women out there, she had a good women's club going there that was getting to be almost nation-wide, and she had a hell of a lot of people in that thing, and I think she was wielding a lot of power, as much power possibly as her husband, maybe more.

But she also had the Americans at a disadvantage either because of her good looks or because of her sharp tongue or something. Very few of the foreigners would contradict or argue with her. I was

not one of them. I'd argue with her. Anytime she said something I thought was wrong, I'd say, "You're just as wrong as you can be." Actually Mrs. Williams would, too, because she and Mrs. Williams were fairly good friends, not very close friends, but pretty good friends. I remember one time that they were up in Dalat. Mrs. Williams was visiting her up in Dalat, which was a summer resort up in the hills. One of Madame Nhu's little boys started whipping a dog with a bicycle chain, and Mrs. Williams told him to stop. He stopped. Mrs. Nhu said, "Why should you stop my boy from whipping that dog with a bicycle chain?" And Mrs. Williams, who was a dog lover and we always had dogs, said, "Because that's not the way a child's supposed to do and you ought not to let your child do things like that." Well, I doubt if there's anyone else in Southeast Asia who would ever talk to Madame Nhu that way. But she liked it. I guess she liked it. She continued to have a pleasant relationship with us. But that's not answering very much your question about Mr. Nhu.

G: Well, you've told me what you recall, and that's what we're after. Let me get back to the problems created by the growing terrorism or insurgency, whichever name you care to put on it. Did we adopt any new policies by 1960 to deal with the problem of security in the countryside?

W: You mean as a nation? You mean MAAG?

G: I mean MAAG in Vietnam. Wasn't there a counter-insurgency plan or something of that nature?

W: Yes.

G: What was the nature of it?

W: I can't remember the details of that.

G: Were there special counter-guerrilla units formed?

W: No. If so I can't remember them at this late date.

G: Okay. Speaking of that, do you remember when the Ranger Battalions first made their appearance in Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Ranger Battalions?

W: I'd say along about 1957 or 1958. I'm guessing. I'd like to say something of that nature about these special detachments.

G: All right.

W: I mentioned that in this U. S. News and World Report business. I was told to organize, train, and equip the Vietnamese army, navy, and air force, and their marines, and their paratroopers. The marines came in as part of the navy and the paratroopers as part of the army. Now to do that, I had to have some kind of organization, because an American army, as you well know from your own army experience, cannot requisition equipment unless you requisition against an approved Table of Organization and Equipment. All right, the Vietnamese had none. So anything that I was getting from the United States I was either begging, borrowing or stealing it, and I was finally told, "All right, you've got to have more formal tables of organization and equipment out there for us to work against. I said, "Fine, that suits me fine. That gives me talking points with the Vietnamese."

So, taking this up with the President and the Secretary of Defense right straight on down, I told them what was necessary and of course they accepted my word for it. I said, "I want to form a Board of army officers who have had experience." Some had had some combat experience at least. Some had administrative experience, and to determine, through this board, through trial and error, tests, and things of that nature a proper Table of Organization and Equipment for their army to start with. So that's what we did.

G: Is this when you first formed the first Vietnamese division, the eight thousand men--

W: No, Mike O'Daniel had done that without any table of organization or anything else. He'd just taken anything he could find because the French had little detachments here, there, and yon. Nothing bigger than a battalion, and he'd just thrown those people together the best way he could. He was just like marching through mud, he was having a terrible time because that's the way the conditions were. I was a little bit better off because he'd done a certain amount of preliminary work.

Anyway, we formed this Board and we finally came up with what I called a Vietnamese division, and I worked with the Board, not directed them or anything of that nature, but nudged them this way and that when they were going off on tangents. And [I] told them we wanted a division that could work in the jungle, in the swamps, in the mountains, those were the main terrain features, and I didn't want a Japanese division, nor an American division, nor a Korean

division nor anything else. I wanted a Vietnamese division that could be theirs. So that's what we got. Now, those divisions were built so they could be broken right on down as far as companies and platoons. Some people that didn't know any better later said, "All right, General Williams and his people organized the Vietnamese division like an American division." Well we didn't do any damn such a thing, and if anyone had taken the trouble to take a Table of Organization of a Vietnamese division and look at, they could see that it didn't resemble an American division as much as it might resemble the Japanese or the Korean division. Actually the supply was based on the Korean labor force type, so what in the world do they call those people up in Korea that the Koreans had with their army up there--

G: Katusas?

W: Katusas, yes. No, wait a minute. Katusas were the soldiers that were with the Americans. I'm talking about the men that carried those A-frames on their backs, that they had instead of trucks. Korean Labor Corps? Or Korean Service Corps? Well, anyway, they had a corps of those people. We used those people as examples when--those were those photographs I saw with you the other day where we built things that looked like bicycles that had two hundred and fifty pound loads on them. And the motor transportation amounted to nothing. Well, you could break those down to squad, platoon, companies--any size you wanted to, to go after guerrillas or to fight a set-piece battle. There's nothing wrong with that

organization, and any military people to this day will admit there's nothing wrong with it, and as a matter of fact, there was no change made in that organization as far as I know as long as American military were in Vietnam, and up until 1970--when did we come out, 1972, wasn't it something like that?

G: We came out in 1972, I believe.

W: Yes. They made no changes in the Vietnamese Table of Organization all during that time. So there wasn't anything wrong with it, but people that didn't know wanted to do any picking that they possibly could. The reason people were talking about Motor Divisions was because these "stringers" that would come in there and write foolish things, they'd see a parade in the city of Saigon, for instance, and the Vietnamese would pull in every old tank they had, every half-truck, bulldozer, anything else that would run, they'd put that in the parade down the street and people would look at that and say, "My God, here's a motorized division." Well, it wasn't any more a motorized division than I've got a motorized division sitting here in my carport. The stringers just didn't know.

But it's easy to pick, pick. A few days ago we saw a headline here in the San Antonio papers: "Navy Goes to San Salvador." You pick that up and read it. Then you read they'd sent down five god-damned sailors to help the San Salvadoran people learn how to run the motors on those motor boats that they had. But there's a head-line two inches high: "U.S. Navy to San Salvador." You might not remember it, but I can tell you that type of reporting was going

on back in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960 and right on through. It was just terrible. What did the U.S. press have to gain?

G: But you read about it, it sounds like gunboat diplomacy all over again.

W: Absolutely. Now, there's talk about advisors. Someone wrote me a letter the other day and said, "We'd like to have your opinion on the advisors to San Salvador. Isn't that the way we started in Vietnam?" My answer to that was advisors in Vietnam didn't cause the war; they had nothing to do with the war. I stayed there until 1960, the war didn't break out until sometime after Diem was overthrown in 1963. I think it broke out in 1965. Well, American advisors didn't cause that war. It was American policy that caused the war indirectly. American policy in overthrowing Ngo Dinh Diem. And we know that's recorded history now. No question about it. But here an intelligent person writes and said "Isn't this the way we got started in Vietnam, by sending advisors?" Well, memory is short, and historical memory, and you're getting to be a historian, or are a historian, and you know that as well or better than I do.

G: In this Table of Organization which you developed with much agonizing and soul-searching and so on, where do the Ranger Battalions fit into this organization?

W: I don't remember that detail. But I know that the Vietnamese wanted Ranger Battalions.

G: This was a Vietnamese idea, then, the Ranger Battalions?

W: Oh, yes, as I recall.

G: I see. What purpose were they supposed to serve?

W: Oh, the Americans had them.

G: I don't understand.

W: America had Rangers just like we've got right now. So the V.N. want them.

G: I see, I see. Did you agree with--

W: I didn't argue with them about it. As long as it didn't bother going ahead with the organization of the division. You just can't have everything your way, you know.

G: I see.

W: The U.S. Green Berets have a great deal of glamor about them.

G: When were they introduced? When did they start coming in?

W: I don't know, but I tell you the first U.S. batch that came in there almost got us in trouble. This was done almost without my knowledge; in other words, someone had set it up, and it had not been the Vietnamese. But someone wanted one of our Ranger Battalions, or one of our Green Beret Battalions, I'll call them, that was up in Okinawa, they wanted them to have some training in Vietnam.

G: Was that what they called a C team, do you remember that designation? I think that's the higher headquarters of a special forces detachment, that's the largest detachment. But that may be a later development, I may be getting ahead of things.

W: Could have been. But anyway, this was instigated by someone other than the Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese came to me and said the Americans want to bring a battalion of the Green Berets in.

G: What Americans now?

W: He didn't say. As far as I know, it was someone in Washington or Hawaii. Not our advisors. They wanted to do this for training, and I said okay. But we must remember that at that time we were under a terrible handicap, because we had only four hundred and forty-two advisors which we had when the Geneva accords were signed, or adopted--we never did sign them. So this International Control Commission made up of the Poles, the Canadians and the Indians always checked very closely any additions we had to MAAG, and we had to defend every one of them. You bring in one extra typist, you had to defend it as though you were bringing in two combat teams. I said, "How are you going to get by with this business?" They said, "Oh, we're going to bring them in over the beaches." I said, "Okay. Where do we want to put them?" "Oh, in such-and-such a place." Now all this had been arranged, not through MAAG.

G: What did they mean by over the beaches? Did they mean under cover of night, or. . . .

W: That's right. They were going to land in rowboats or motor boats.

G: Okay. A tactical landing.

W: That's right. Come in over the beaches. No ships in sight. Okay. Now that was done, and this was going to be kept a great secret. So they brought in this battalion, and they coiled up there in the hills, over on the east coast.

G: Do you remember about where that was?

W: Oh, I'd say it was up around that enormous big bay up there.

G: Cam Ranh?

W: Cam Ranh Bay, yes. Close to Cam Ranh Bay. And the Vietnamese were going to work with them, and the Vietnamese detailed some of their troops to work with them, say, a battalion or a couple of companies, something like that. All this was in great secrecy, and I knew that if anything happened and the secrecy was broken that I was going to have a terrible lot of trouble with the Control Commission made up of the Indians and the Canadians and the Poles. And I was having plenty of trouble with those people anyway. So about the first thing that happened after the battalion had landed they took a half a dozen or so of these Green Berets and they put them in an automobile or a truck and moved them by road down towards, and in the general direction of Saigon, but only, oh, say, about ten or twelve miles from where the battalion was coiled in the hills. And turned them loose and said your compass direction is such-and-such, now go through the jungles and get back to your battalion.

G: Strictly a training exercise?

W: Strictly a training exercise. In a few days, word came to me, "We can't find our people." I said, "What do you mean you can't find them?" They then explained to me what had happened, you see? And I said, "Well, I'll find them for you." So I got some Vietnamese soldiers, or officers, in that vicinity, and I said, "There's some Americans lost in these damn jungles between here and the coast and God knows where they are because they've got compasses, and

they're supposed to be able to navigate--all you got to do is march straight east and you will come to the coast anyway." And the Vietnamese went in and found them. The goddamned Green Berets had gotten lost. Ten miles from the coast. So help me! Then I began to get skeptical about these people.

So the next thing that happened, I got information that there'd been a terrible accident out there, and so I got there as quickly as I could. You see, I was staying away from all this stuff, because I wanted to be--if the Commission had said anything to me about it, I'd have said, "Gentlemen, what the hell are you talking about?" See? And the Vietnamese government theoretically were, too, because all this was under cover. I went out there, and there was a Vietnamese officer dead, there was an American captain dead, of the Green Berets, there was an American warrant officer with one arm gone, and that was just about it.

I said, "What the hell happened?" Well, here's what happened as they explained it to me. We had a convoy moving down the road, and we had certain Vietnamese here and we were teaching them how to handle a convoy, and so a fire fight started, simulated, and they wanted to add a little bit of zest to it, so they had some sticks of dynamite. Now, these people are sitting around an open fire, and they'd light one of these sticks of dynamite with the fuse on, and they'd throw it like that, and exploding it, imitating artillery fire. Now, that's like a state fair in Texas in 1914. Two militia companies having a sham battle. To my mind, that's

what it sounded like. What happened, the warrant officer threw one stick of dynamite and it failed to go where he wanted it to, and it killed an American captain. It also knocked off his own arm, and it did this other damage.

Well, I said, the soup's certainly in the fire. But I didn't know how much so, but how we got out of it I don't know, because a few days later--of course they evacuated these people and then later evacuated the battalion. They pulled out again over the beaches. A little bit later, I saw or was sent, rather, a clipping out of a newspaper that was published in Okinawa that said Captain so-and-so, and gave his name, his organization and so forth, was killed during an exercise in Vietnam on such-and-such a day by a premature explosion of a stick of dynamite. Now, if the Viet Cong or Hanoi had been smart enough to be reading the newspapers, they would have wondered "Now, why was this captain of this Green Beret outfit that's stationed in Okinawa, what the hell is he doing in Vietnam with a stick of dynamite?" You see? It gave away the whole show. Now, if Hanoi picked it up I don't know because I never heard a word about it, I didn't hear anything about it from the International Control Commission, no Vietnamese ever said anything to me about it, and no American ever said anything to me about it to this day.

G: Now, something occurs to me. You said that these Green Berets were primarily on a training mission.

W: That was my understanding.

G: Was it their training or the South Vietnamese?

W: Their training.

G: Their training.

W: As far as I was concerned, or as far as I was told.

G: Now, you may not know the answer to this, but it occurs to me that this is a legitimate question. Why send them to Vietnam where all the problems which you have mentioned exist? Why not send them to the Philippines where you don't have an International Control Commission?

W: That would be a good question, wouldn't it?

G: Same terrain, isn't it?

W: Yes. I haven't the slightest, foggiest idea.

G: All right. Were you there when the Special Forces came in to stay, then? I think this is in 1960. I think this is in the spring and summer of 1960.

W: I can't remember but it must have been after my departure on 1 September 1960.

G: Okay. Can you think of any other important developments in that last nine months, eight or nine months that you were in country? The reason I'm asking, I have seen reference in the Pentagon Papers, one edition of them, which says that there was something called a counter-insurgency plan, which was developed late 1959, early 1960, and that the Green Berets and the Ranger Battalions were involved in it. But I don't know much more than that.

W: Well, my memory's just not that good.

G: Okay, okay. Was your successor General [Lionel] McGarr?

W: Yes.

G: Were you able to brief him before you left?

W: Oh, yes. He was there, oh, maybe ten or twelve, fifteen days before I left.

G: What kind of a picture did you paint for him, as you can recall?

W: I laid everything flat out on the table.

G: How did it look?

W: I didn't think it looked very well.

I didn't know General McGarr. He had been the commandant of the Command and General Staff College, I've been told, and I'd also been told he'd been in the 3rd Division during World War II. So since Mike O'Daniel, my predecessor, had commanded the 3rd Division in the latter stages of World War II, I wrote and asked Mike what he could tell me about McGarr--I forgot his first name.

G: Lionel, I think.

W: Lionel McGarr. His nickname was "Split Head."

G: Was that because he parted his hair in the middle?

W: That's what I was told. Mike O'Daniel wrote back and he said, "He's the best regimental commander I ever knew in combat." So, the Vietnamese were of course probing me, who's going to take your place and so and so forth, and I said, "I don't know this officer," but I said, "General O'Daniel tells me he's the best regimental commander he ever knew, and so he must be pretty good, because General O'Daniel was a hell of a good division commander." So that was the

only thing I could tell them, and I just told McGarr everything that I knew that was going on. That's where I left it with him. I was told later that General McGarr didn't like things the way he found them, and that surprised me, but then I was told that that was not unusual because that was his method of operation. Any outfit he went into he always took it apart and put it back together according to his own ideas, some people do that.

I hadn't put the two things together, but while he was commandant of the Command and General Staff College, I had sent back to the United States to the Command and General Staff College a few Vietnamese general officers. I was told later, much later, much later, several years later, that Diem had possibly developed an idea that some of his officers who had gone to school at the Command and General Staff College when McGarr was there as commandant, had gone in collusion with McGarr as to a coup d'etat. I thought to myself that's ridiculous, because knowing the Vietnamese officers as well as I did, I didn't believe any of them would be bold enough to go to a stranger, an American officer at the Command and General Staff school, and talk about a coup d'etat that was not going to take place until four or five years later. It just didn't make sense. Now of course, whether Diem actually thought that or ever expressed that opinion I don't know because there's any number of things that I was told that Diem expressed an opinion on, later, that I don't believe he did at all.

G: What was your impression of General McGarr, or did you have a chance, really, to form one?

W: I didn't have a chance to form any definite impression of him at all. I thought he was very impatient to get started, and I could understand that. I tell you, I was so busy there at the last, I didn't have the time to sit down and try to analyze my successor.

G: Now, he didn't last nearly as long in that.

W: Oh, he didn't last at all.

G: What was the scuttlebutt on that?

W: Well, of course, the only thing I can tell you is pure gossip, which I don't like to participate in. I was told that he was relieved because of heart trouble. Now, whether he was or not, I don't know. I was also told that things had gotten into very bad condition, and he possibly was relieved because Washington thought he wasn't getting along very well.

G: With who? With the Vietnamese?

W: Well, certainly not with Diem. An officer told me that after a while it became infrequent for him to be sent for to come to the Palace to talk with the President, and one time after he hadn't been to the Palace for maybe a month, when the President sent for him, he asked some of his staff, "What in the world will I talk to the President about?" Well, of course, something had happened there, and I have no idea what it was, because it had not been unusual for me to be at the Palace two or three times a week and anywhere from one to four hours at a time, and talk about everything under

the sun. So for the President to go for a month without sending for the chief of MAAG, I just can't understand what the hell was going on.

G: Something obviously was not right, is that your feeling?

W: There must not have been the close association there that Diem had with me. Maybe it'd be a good idea to interview McGarr.

G: We're going to try. We're going to try. We're going to try to get to General Harkins pretty soon, too.

W: What'd you think about these other people? What about Major General Ruggles and--?

G: I've written them all letters.

W: What about this man here at 5th Army Headquarters?

G: I don't remember that name.

(Interruption)

Now, you left country in September of 1960, is that correct?

W: First day of September, yes.

G: And a couple of months later there was an attempted coup. It failed. What was your reaction when you heard about that?

W: I thought it was ridiculous. The man who attempted to pull that coup was a brigadier general or maybe a colonel at that time by the name of Tri--T-R-I--and he had command of the paratroop brigade. It actually wasn't a brigade; he had about eight hundred paratroopers. But they like to call it a brigade--well, in the American army today we've taken every regiment of three battalions and we call it a brigade. I'm used to thinking about a brigade

as being two infantry regiments. But I thought the coup was ridiculous, and I couldn't understand why they let it go as far as it did.

G: By "they," who do you mean?

W: The Americans and the Vietnamese. I think that Tri--it's known now, or at least a lot of people believe it to be true--that Tri, even if he didn't have any encouragement from the Americans, nevertheless he found no opposition from them. For instance, there's a man by the name of Gene Gregory and his wife who were Americans, and they ran a newspaper in Vietnam.

G: Was that the Times [of Vietnam]?

W: The Vietnamese Times I think was the name of it. I know that he was out of the country and she was there by herself, and she appealed to the American embassy for help, and she was ignored. Gregory resented that bitterly. But anyway, they asked me, someone asked me at one time--maybe it was you, but I think it was someone much earlier, a long time ago--what I would have done if I had been there, and I have said, I'd have gone up there and gotten hold of Tri and told him to get his damn paratroopers back in barracks or I was going to kick his ass clear across Saigon, and he would have done it. He would have done it just like that (snaps fingers) too. He's a good man, but he's had funny ideas, and one of them was that he thought he could pull a coup d'etat. But he would have obeyed me.

G: What do you think was behind that? Why pull a coup d'etat?

W: Well, he possibly thought that Big Minh or Don or some of the others or Diem was going to try to pull one--maybe he thought he could beat them to it. Absolutely no understanding what he might think about anything like that. You know, to understand why a Vietnamese or any oriental will do anything, some say you have to think the way they do. Well, it's impossible for me to always think the way they do. I think sometimes I can think the way they do, but not always.

Now, what in the world Tri had in his mind, I don't know. But he certainly didn't intend to succeed, and I'm told that some of the marines, V.N. had a battalion of marines at that time--I don't know really if we had more at the time or not--but when I was there, the V.N. had about a battalion of marines. Some of the marines went down and joined Tri's outfit, and they surrounded the Palace, but one of the naval officers there called in his deputy and told him to take over the Naval Yard, that he was going to the coup. He took a company of marines and went up and told Tri he was going to help him and marched right on down and marched through the gates of the Palace, up into the Palace, and turned around and started shooting at the marines and paratroopers who were on the outside. And he became a favorite of President Diem after that, because there was a naval officer that the President hadn't paid much attention to prior to that time, who had taken a marine force and through guile had come through the lines, as they were, and entered the Palace and came to his help.

Now why did he do that? Did he know, did he have some instinct the coup was going to fall and he wanted to be on the right side? Or if he had that instinct, why didn't he say, "Well, I'm going to stay out of it entirely?" He didn't have to go up there. Why did he decide to go? Was that because of his admiration for Diem? Possibly. Diem certainly was not unpopular with the rank and file of the military.

Now, of course a lot of this that I'm telling you, I got from corresponding with Vietnamese or Americans long after I left Vietnam. Now I don't do that anymore, because there's no one over there, no Americans over there I care to correspond with, and the Vietnamese--I broke off with those people, corresponding with those generals shortly after the coup d'etat that killed Diem.

G: Speaking of that coup d'etat, the one that ousted Diem, most Americans all during this time were baffled by the coups and the counter-coups, the attempted coups, I think because they couldn't understand what was behind it. Nobody could satisfactorily explain it. Did you ever try to explain it to anyone or could you explain it to anyone?

W: I have my own personal ideas about it, and it comes right back to the city of Washington in the United States. We had a man there that was Assistant Secretary of State for Southeast Asia--I think was his title--and he was anti-Diem, there's no doubt about that, and I think some of the American embassy in Saigon were anti-Diem and possibly part of the U.S. State Department was. So this Assistant Secretary wrote a message one day to Ambassador Lodge and called up

John Kennedy on the telephone who was at Hyannis Port at that time and read the message to him, and Kennedy asked, "Does [Maxwell] Taylor"--who was at that time chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff--"and McNamara"--who was Secretary of Defense--"Does Taylor and McNamara know about this?" The Assistant Secretary said, "Yes." And Kennedy said, "All right, send it."

Now, McNamara didn't know anything about it, and Taylor didn't know anything about it, and both of them said they didn't know anything about it when it finally came to light. This was Saturday about noon--Taylor knew about it Monday morning when he came to his office and the duty officer had a bunch of outgoing messages laid on his desk. He saw that, and from the description to me from a person who saw this happen, Taylor absolutely hit the ceiling and immediately got hold of people over in State and said, "Why did you dispatch this without giving me the courtesy of expressing an opinion?" I was told that McNamara did the same thing but not from an eyewitness account. The State Department people said, "Well, we sent it to your office, so we presumed you saw it." Well, that was too much. This was a message to Lodge to all intents and purposes saying we need a change on V.N. and let the conspirators go ahead. And Lodge did exactly that; he took off from the embassy and went to his quarters, and he stayed there, but he had a man by the name of [Lou] Conein I believe his name was. He was a CIA man. He was at the headquarters of the coup d'etat people, and who has since written and published the fact that he was in constant

communication with Ambassador Lodge by both telephone and radio during the entire time and told Lodge exactly what was going on step by step. No one else, apparently, could get hold of Lodge, at least everyone said they couldn't. But anyway, Big Minh went ahead and pulled a coup.

Now I immediately said, "Well, what the hell was [Paul] Harkins doing during that time?" All right, Harkins' people, or Harkins himself--I can't say he did himself, because he didn't tell me personally but I believe it's been published that Harkins heard that this coup was in the mill, and he sent one of his staff officers to General Tran Van Don and asked "What about this coup d'etat that I hear about?" Tran Van Don says, "I don't know what you're talking about." So then Harkins dismissed it from his mind. Well, I could have told Harkins or anyone else that you can't send a staff officer to Tran Van Don or any other Vietnamese general's that worth a damn, and say, "What about a coup? Tell me about it." They're going to say, "I don't know anything about it." If Harkins himself had gone to Don, and if his relationship with Don was what it should have been, he could have said, "Don"--had him off in a parade ground or someplace like that and say, "Don, what the hell is this about a coup d'etat?" Don would very likely have told him the whole business. But he's not going to tell a third person. You see my point?

G: Especially a staff officer.

W: Yes. And any third person, no one's going to do that. I don't believe if you're going to pull a coup d'etat in the United States you could do it that way. Well, they pulled a coup d'etat and I had told Diem--and he did it the first time when we had this one in November of 1960--I said "If you ever get in a difficulty and they start anything like this, coil yourself and take as good care of yourself as you possibly can and start talking. And keep in conversation, because as long as you can keep in conversation, they're going to make a mistake and you can take advantage of it. And get in some troops from outside that you can trust." All right, he did that exactly in 1960. He kept talking, and while they, the people, were horsing around there, the marines came through to back him up. He called up people on the radio from outside, and they moved in their troops, loyal officers came in (snaps fingers), Tri and his paratroopers had it. That ended the coup right then.

Well, I think he tried the same thing in 1963, because he was there quite a while before he and his brother left the Palace and went over to Cholon. But now we also want to remember--and none of them deny it; Don doesn't deny it, Big Minh doesn't deny it and no one else in that outfit ever denied it to my knowledge. They told Diem that "All you've got to do is surrender and we're going to accept your surrender, put you on an airplane, then send you out of the country." I think Diem carried out what I told him as well as he could. He talked as long as he could; he saw that he

wasn't going to get any further with it, and he got into an automobile and went to Cholon. There was all kinds of things in the paper at the time about having an underground tunnel and all that stuff, which was pure newspaper rhetoric. It wasn't true at all. He merely got in an automobile and drove over there. That's all there was to it. Then he got over there, and he went into this church--he was an extremely devout man. His brother was, too, as far as I know--and then he called coup headquarters and said, "We're ready to surrender." They came over and picked him up; Major General Xuan was in command of the detail.

G: Can you tell where your--is this from more or less first-hand sources?

W: Where did I get this information?

G: Where did you get this? Now I know you weren't there personally.

W: That's right.

G: But I know you have contacts.

W: That's right.

G: And I want to know who you're citing here.

W: Well, I wouldn't attempt to tell you, because I don't remember. I was corresponding with several Vietnamese officers at that time or shortly thereafter--I said after a while ago I decided to break them off, break off those contacts--but where, I don't know who told me that. Part of it's covered by General Tran Van Don in his book. Don says that when--I've got to go back just a little bit

and quote a dead man. There's a Catholic priest by the name of DeJeagher--now dead--

G: Can you spell that?

W: De-J-E-A-G-H-E-R.

G: That's good enough.

W: DeJeagher's picture was laying here on--well, here it is right here. See that man shaking hands with Diem? That came out of my files the other day. That's Father Raymond DeJeagher, and here's the way he--

G: And that's President Chiang Kai-shek, isn't it?

W: That's right.

G: And is that Minh in the background that I see?

W: That's Big Minh standing back behind there.

G: He was a big man.

Q: Oh, yes. He was big. He was bigger than either you or I, which was very unusual for a Vietnamese.

G: And this picture was taken in January, 1960 during his visit to Taiwan. All right, please go ahead, sir.

W: Well, DeJeagher was a Catholic priest that was teaching school in China when the communists took over China and put him in prison and kept him in prison for a number of years--and when I say a number of years [I mean], what, five, ten, fifteen, something like that--and then released him. He continued on in Southeast Asia, and he was a very close friend of the Nationalist Chinese as contrasted to the Red Chinese, and he was a very close confidante

of Ngo Dinh Diem. We got to be friends. And I corresponded with DeJeagher, up until he died which was maybe a year ago. Cancer.

Well, I got a lot of information from DeJeagher, because he knew the Vietnamese inside out, and he had a thorough network with his Chinese friends in that country. So I got a lot of information from him. But anyway, I've got it very firm in my mind, and I'll give it to you the best I can.

Diem and his brother called up the coup headquarters and told them they were ready to surrender, and they said they'd send for them. Some of the people that were in the convoy that went and got them were suspicious when they didn't send an automobile for them but sent an armored personnel carrier. So they put Diem and his brother in the back of this armored personnel carrier, and the convoy started off heading towards Saigon.

G: Why would they be suspicious on that account? What was the significance of--?

W: Well here's a President of a country that's surrendering and has been promised that he'll be exiled and nothing else and sent out, and he gives himself up, and they send for him. They don't send a car for him but send a closed personnel carrier for him. An armored personnel carrier.

G: The fact that it's closed makes it--

W: That's right. Because they never came out of it alive. Because when they got out of that thing, or were hauled out of it, Mr. Nhu had been stabbed repeatedly, and the President had been stabbed

once or twice, and both of them had been shot repeatedly. And they dumped their bodies out on the ground there at the coup headquarters. Now, Don comes into it this way as I remember his statement in his book. He said that he had come into the headquarters where Big Minh was sitting--or standing, whatnot--and General Xuan walked in and said "The mission is accomplished." Don said, "I understood that to mean that the President and his brother were there at the headquarters, and I went out to arrange quarters for them, where we're going to put them up until the time we shipped them out." He said, "It wasn't until later that I found out that they both had been murdered." And he said, "I had nothing to do with it. I didn't know anything about it." But he says, "Big Minh had something to do with it, and Xuan had something to do with it because Xuan said 'the mission has been accomplished.'" Well, anyway, Big Minh's aide-de-camp, who went out to Cholon to get them, was immediately arrested, and put in prison, then immediately hanged himself or was hung. So there goes your witness. Okay. Now, what was I leading up to? What was your question?

G: I was asking you--

W: Where I found out all this.

G: Well, you had answered that. My question I think was mainly, as an old China hand, so to say, weren't you called on by friends and acquaintances and media and so forth to try to explain at various times what is behind this seeming Vietnamese passion for overthrowing

the government every couple of months? 1960 was only the first of a long series of coups and attempted coups.

W: I don't remember whether that many people asking me about it or not.

G: Well, let me ask you.

W: Well, now, will you voice your question once more? Exactly what is your question?

G: What is behind this apparent Vietnamese passion for coups? Now, I know it's a third world phenomenon, but we were primarily focusing on Vietnam, and I'd like your opinion on that. Americans could never understand it.

W: Well, I can't remember of a coup d'etat--of course I'm not too sure of my history--but I can't remember of a coup d'etat in Vietnam prior to the coup d'etat in 1960 that attempted to overthrow Diem by Tri and the paratroopers.

G: True. But after that comes a whole series--

W: After that, sure. Every Tom, Dick, and Harry said, "It's my turn. I want to take a whirl at it."

G: What do you think prompted the first one in 1960? Do you think it was simply officer ambition?

W: I think so. And stupidity.

G: All right, let me ask one more question about this coup business and then I want to leave and go on.

W: Of course I think they were needled into this by everyone you could possibly think of.

G: You think they were urged by Americans?

W: Yes, I think they were urged by some Americans. They were very likely urged by some French, they were urged by the North Vietnamese, they were urged by anyone that wanted to see that country go communist. Because in my discussions with these officers prior to my leaving there in 1960, anytime we talked about a coup, we ended up with a consensus that the only people who could ever benefit from a coup would be the communists. And they agreed to it.

G: And that ended it.

W: That would end the discussion until the next time someone would say, "Hell, let's do such and such."

G: There were reports that there was widespread celebration in Saigon when the news that the Diem government had been overthrown spread. I don't know what the reports were from the countryside. I don't remember even seeing a report from the countryside. Do you have an explanation for that? Was Diem that unpopular in Saigon?

W: No, couldn't have been. Couldn't have been.

G: Well, then, why the mass demonstration?

W: Well, I don't know. Didn't we see a demonstration a few days ago where several hundred people appeared outside the White House up there clamoring because we'd sent some four, five or a dozen, fifty advisors down to El Salvador?

G: Oh, yes, sir, but I'm not--you can always find a few hundred people to demonstrate for anything. I realize that.

W: Okay.

G: But these demonstrations were--at least they were reported to be, and reported across the board, every reporter said this, in the thousands and thousands of people. There were mobs of people in the streets of Saigon.

W: It could have been. I don't know; I wasn't there, but I didn't realize anything like that was going on. Of course, there had been the trouble with the Buddhists and coming back to Madame Nhu again, American reporters used the word barbecue, and she repeated it and thereafter no American reporters was ever quoted--it was always Madame Nhu talking about Buddhist barbecuing themselves.

G: Oh, you think it was an American reporter who used that term first?

W: Why, it was published, it was an American reporter who used the term, said to the President or Madame Nhu, "The Buddhists have barbecued another man down here on the street. What about it?" And so she picked up the expression and immediately it went world-wide: "Madame Nhu's talking about barbecuing the Buddhists."

G: And she got the credit?

W: She got the credit.

G: Let me change my tape.

Tape 2 of 2

G: Now, General, you have mentioned, in passing, the press in Vietnam a few times, and I would like to ask you to comment directly on the press. What would you say was the general caliber of the press who were covering Vietnam in the years when you were there?

W: Exceptionally poor. To the best of my knowledge, they had no regular assigned reporters out there, and they were relying on various and sundry people that in the newspaper vernacular I believe they call "stringers."

G: Now the stringer, if I'm not mistaken, is a person who's paid by the column. He's not on a regular salary.

W: That's right. And he might write for this newspaper today and that one tomorrow and so on and so forth. Because I asked that question one time of one of these people. I said, "Where are you getting information, and who are your reporters?" and so forth. Now who that was I was asking, I don't remember, but it was someone in a position to know. They said, "Well, we don't have anyone out here. We just rely on stringers." And I said, "Well, why I'm asking is because I read a column here by a young man," and I happen to know that fellow, and I said, "he's barely out of his teens, he's half-French, half-Vietnamese, and I don't think he was too well-educated, and if he's getting coverage like this, it's astounding because, frankly, the man's not, he doesn't know what he's writing about." And they said, "Well, that's the risk we take."

G: I want to ask you about a couple of individual reporters in particular to see if any of these strike a memory or whatever. The reason I'm mentioning these names is because a couple of people in the military have mentioned them to me as being one kind of

reporter or another, and I want to see what your reaction is. Do you remember Till and Peg Durdin of the New York Times? Does that name ring a bell?

W: It does not.

G: All right. How about Hank Liebermann, also of the New York Times?

W: No.

G: Homer Bigart of the New York Herald-Tribune?

W: No.

G: Here's one I think you might remember. John Mecklin of Life-Time.

W: I recognize his name, but I don't remember if I ever met him or not.

G: Well, I think Mecklin wrote a book called Mission in Torment. Mecklin later became the public affairs officer for the embassy. He was a reporter, in other words, who changed sides, you might say.

W: I didn't know him.

G: Okay. Did you know John Roderick of the Associated Press?

W: No.

G: Okay. Were you able to stay abreast of developments in Vietnam after you retired? I know you said you were in correspondence with a number of people over there.

W: I'd like to go back to your last question.

G: Oh, certainly.

W: I can't understand why I don't recognize those names. Now, even making allowance for poor memory after twenty some-odd years, I can never remember a newspaper correspondent or columnist coming to

Vietnam that didn't contact me and ask [for] an interview, if you please, or a conversation, things of that nature. And there was never one turned down, and sometimes those things would last for hours. I'm thinking of people like Jim Lucas and maybe Maggie Higgins and, well, those are the only two names I can think of right at this particular moment.

G: Well, let me ask you to comment on those two, Lucas and Higgins.

W: Well, I knew Jim Lucas previously, and I remember quite well his coming to Vietnam because the Secretary of the President called me and told me that a reporter by the name of Jim Lucas and some other man were at some place--either in Tokyo or Seoul, or some place else--and wanted a visa to come to South Vietnam, and what did I think about it? I said, "I know Jim Lucas--because I knew him in Korea and I think I knew him in Europe, but I wasn't too sure--"but the other man I don't know, and Jim Lucas is a good reporter and an honest man. I can't help you with the others."

Well, as it turned out, Jim Lucas got a visa to come to Vietnam, and the other man didn't. I didn't put much importance to it until the Ambassador said to me one day right after Jim Lucas got there, "How in the world did Jim Lucas get a visa to South Vietnam?" And I said, "Why, I don't know. Was there any problem?" And I related this instance I've just related to you. He said, "No one gets a visa to South Vietnam unless I say so." I said, "Mr. Ambassador, that's a stupid, goddamn remark to make." I said, "There's thousands of people come to Vietnam that you don't even know anything about."

G: What was his reaction to that?

W: Well, he just sat there and looked at me. Of course it was true. Did he know every American, every Englishman, every Australian, every Frenchman, or anyone else that got a visa to come to South Vietnam? And the Vietnamese wouldn't dare to issue a visa without handing it to him for approval? Why, that's ridiculous, see? Well, stupid things like that were being said all the time. Well, anyway, that's what caused me to remember Jim Lucas, you see?

Then he went ahead with this conversation. He said, "Is Jim Lucas a friend of yours?" I said, "Not necessarily." I said, "I know him. He interviewed me in Korea when I commanded a Division up there, and I think he interviewed me when I had a Corps there, maybe when I was Deputy Army Commanding in Korea, I'm not sure." And I said, "Maybe I've talked to him in Germany. I don't remember." But I said, "I know Jim Lucas. I'd say, yes, I consider him a friend and at least an acquaintance." He said, "All right, now I want you to keep a diary, and every time you talk to Jim Lucas or he talks to you, I want you to write down exactly what the conversation was about, and I want you to report it to me." And in utter amazement I said, "Well, shall I tell Jim Lucas that I'm spying on him?" He said, "Of course not, goddamn it, don't tell anyone!" Well, I said, "You've just told a room full of people." And I said, "I'm not going to do it. Period." And I didn't do it. Now what he had against Jim Lucas, I haven't the slightest idea, but those were the kind of things that would--people would say, "why, what

the hell happened at the country team meetings?" There's an example of what happened in one country team meeting. Apropos, nothing.

Van Fleet. General [James A.] Van Fleet was Commanding General of the 8th Army, when I first went to Korea. Van Fleet phoned me one time and he said, "I'm coming down to Vietnam"--no, he didn't phone me, he sent me a TWX--he said, "I'm coming to South Vietnam and Saigon, and I sure hope to see you." Well, I'd been a Division Commander under Van Fleet, and I knew him from Europe, too, and I liked him very much and had great admiration for him, and I thought that was fine. So when he came to Saigon, he phoned me, and I immediately invited him out the next day, or sometime soon--we'll say the next day--to come out and have a highball, a cocktail or something and invited some Vietnamese general officers to meet him. And also the V.N. Secretary of State for the Presidency.

We were having little pleasantries there, and I found out that he was representing some U.S. company that was selling some kind of equipment, electrical equipment or something else. What it was I don't know, and it was as immaterial to me at the time as it is now. But he said, "I'd like to talk to the President. Can that be arranged?" And I said, "Well, General, I don't see why it can't. Sitting in that corner right over there is the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. Why don't you tell them and very likely they can arrange it." He walked right over and started talking to them, and the next day he had an appointment with the President, and he went up to see President Diem.

The next time we had an embassy meeting, the Ambassador said to the multitude, and looking at me, "How the hell did Van Fleet get an appointment with the President?" Someone said, "General Williams arranged it." I said, "You're mistaken. I didn't arrange an appointment with the President of South Vietnam with General Van Fleet, but if I'd been asked to, I would have." But I said, "Van Fleet was at my quarters, along with several Vietnamese, and he said that he wanted an appointment with the President, and I said, 'there's the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Why don't you talk to them?'" And I said, "He got it." Well, again, it's just like "no one gets a visa unless I say so." He says, "No one can have an appointment with President Ngo Dinh Diem without my permission." I just looked at him and laughed. Stupid. Incredible! I'm sure the British ambassador didn't call up Durbrow and ask if he could have an appointment with President Ngo Dinh Diem. You know, that's egotism to the extent that a person may be getting on the verge of incompetence. To me it is. Was it insecurity? Inferiority complex? The case of Van Fleet. The case of Jim Lucas.

G: That's a good story.

W: These other reporters.

G: How about Higgins, Maggie Higgins?

W: You know, I don't remember anything about Maggie Higgins, although I'm positive I engaged her in conversation or she engaged me in conversation. But I've read her books, or some of her writings.

G: What did you think of them?

W: I thought they were excellent. I thought she had a very clear grasp of what the situation was.

G: Did you read any of the reporters who came a little later, just after you left? Like--well, I guess the most famous and obvious one was Halberstam--David Halberstam.

W: Oh, yes.

G: What did you think of David Halberstam?

W: Terrible reporting.

G: Terrible. What was wrong with him?

W: I didn't think he knew what he was talking about in the first place, and in the second place, I thought he was trying to undermine the Vietnamese government.

G: He was one of the younger ones who was over his depth or out of his experience, would you say?

W: I thought so. That's a very bold thing for me to say, because he has quite a reputation--I presume he still has a reputation--as a writer, and I don't but if you ask me a layman's opinion, that's it. I considered him pink, if not red.

G: I think I missed Robert Shaplen. Do you ever read any of his things? Shaplen wrote one called The Road from War, and then he had an earlier book, too.

W: No, I don't remember.

G: The Lost Revolution, I believe, is the name of it.

W: But that thing that you so graciously gave me the other day which was an extract of U.S. News and World Report--I'll tell you how come

that thing to be in existence. I had great admiration for the man who was running U.S. News and World Report at that time, long since deceased. And I was reading these reports from Vietnam, which I thought were terribly slanted or some of them were downright false and didn't jibe at all with what American officers were telling me, or writing me from Vietnam or what Vietnamese officers were writing. And I read one of these articles in U.S. News and World Report, and I sat down and wrote this gentleman. I wrote, "I'm a long subscriber to U.S. News and World Report, and I consider it one of the best, most informative magazines in the United States, and I've always relied on it," I said, "but I've just finished reading such-and-such an article--" and I don't remember the name of it or who wrote-- "but it's the most astounding thing I ever read in my life because it's utterly false from beginning to end. And I think you should know that some of your readers have that kind of impression of it."

Well, by George, that opened the floodgates, and either by telegram, letters or telephone calls and so forth, they asked me if I would submit to an interview about South Vietnam, and I said "I certainly will, if you'll let me read what your people write before you publish it." Well and good. In no time at all, there two of them were right here at my gate, and that thing that you brought in to me the other day was the result of it. Now, who [was] the man that I was criticizing at that time, I don't know. But--

G: Let me ask you about that interview. Did they in fact publish what you said? Did you approve of--?

W: Yes. You got it, right? You gave me a copy.

G: Yes, I gave you a copy. I have one. Okay.

W: Yes. And they sent it to me in draft form, and I read it and put a note on there something to the effect, "I'm not going to attempt to correct the English. You people can do it better than I can. This is okay for publication as far as I'm concerned." And by George, they did it. Now, I think I was exceptionally fortunate. That magazine's bound to get a world of letters, and some secretary saw mine and for some reason, said, "Well, here's something that the top honcho should see," and pitched it into him and that was his reaction. It could just as easily have been thrown in the waste-basket.

G: Well, some knowledgeable person screened the mail, that's all.

W: It could have been. It could have been.

G: Well, do you want to add anything about the media, anything about the press that you haven't had a chance to stick in?

Q: No, but I think that we've got the same thing coming up right now that we had then. We have a two-inch headline coming out in a very good newspaper that says "The Navy Goes to San Salvador" and you read it, you find out they sent five sailors. They raise the question, is this leading to another Vietnam? Well, to me that's someone that's attempting to manipulate the American public to make them scared of what the administration is trying to do. That's my firm conviction. And there's so many people that have no more idea about what the advisors did in South Vietnam or anything else

about South Vietnam, that they can say, "Well, is this another South Vietnam?" And everyone immediately screams.

Now, what was wrong with South Vietnam? First of all, I don't think we should have fought there, and I don't think there was any reason for us to have fought there, and I sincerely believe that if Ngo Dinh Diem had stayed alive that we would not have fought there. I think he would have come to accommodation with Ho Chi Minh. President Diem told me that he knew Ho Chi Minh very well, and Ho Chi Minh offered him a place in his government in Hanoi. They were on speaking terms; they could negotiate. I think that--and I mentioned in that U.S. News and World Report thing if I remember correctly--that every time anyone came to Vietnam--that is, I'm talking about American officialdom--they had audiences with the President, and I would say nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, I would be present, and never did I hear any of them say anything except sometime during the conversation, "Mr. President, you're doing exactly right. We're behind you 100 per cent. You keep on pitching, and we're going to back you up to the hilt." From congressmen, senators, vice president of the United States--Nixon came there as vice president of the United States--generals, four-star generals from chief of staff of the army right straight on down to maybe commanding general of the U.S. Army of the Pacific--they'd all say the same thing. President Diem had an idea, I'm afraid that he got an idea, "I can go as far as I want to because the United States is going to back me up."

G: Some people say that his attitude was, "They're going to back me up because they haven't got any option and they've got to back me no matter what I do."

W: He could have thought that, but I wouldn't say that I thought he thought it, because I couldn't see that far into the man's brain. The option was, of course, just for us to pull out lock, stock and barrel. That could have been done easily, just like that (snaps fingers). And any number of times I thought we were going to do it.

G: Oh, really? When did you think they were going to do it?

W: Well, when I kept asking for people. As I said before, I had about four hundred and forty-two people I inherited when I took over--were there when the French were there--and we were able to increase that a little by pulling in teams to do this and teams to do that, and they'd come in and stay a few months and then go back out, and that would satisfy the International Control Commission. I wanted at least two thousand advisors there, and I needed them very badly because--I imagine they're running into the same thing down here in El Salvador--you have motors, you have motorboats, you have tanks, you have different kind of weapons and so forth; you have spare parts, and you have to storage them properly so that you can fill requisitions on them. You got to know where the spare parts are--you've got to have spare-part bins for this, spare-part bins for that--and you've got to have someone that's cognizant with the weapon or the material that you're using to know how to store those

things and to teach someone else how to issue them. You have ammunition to store. It's just as simple as that. The two thousand advisors I wanted--I wanted advisors down a little bit below division level, and I wanted to get down to regimental or battalion level, if possible, and I wanted to get people in it that could deal more with the finance and with the supply and logistics and motors and schools and things of that nature. Not necessarily to get out there and take a carbine or an M-1 rifle and go help run down some damn guerrilla. But they wouldn't give them to me. And I don't know when they broke that, but I think it was after Diem's death in 1963 before they ever broke that. I'm not sure.

G: Well, I know at the time of President Kennedy's death, which was just a month later, we had sixteen thousand.

W: No, couldn't have?

G: Yes, sir.

W: Sixteen thousand? But that was in 1963. They should have been furnished in 1957.

G: Yes, sir.

W: Well, they didn't wait until Diem died then before they started pushing them in?

G: No, they started pushing them.

W: Are these troops or advisors you're talking about?

G: Total. Total American military.

W: Yes?

G: Military of all kinds.

W: Well, I imagine then by that time you very likely had some Green Berets in there?

G: Yes, and they were getting advisors down at regimental level by that time.

W: Yes?

G: Did any subsequent administration ever call on you for advice, consult with you, contact you in any way? Kennedy or Johnson?

W: Not really. I went up, was invited up to the Military Academy to make an address in May of 1961, I think. Couldn't have been 1971--that was too long later. But on the way back, General [Edward] Lansdale asked me if I would come by Washington and serve there as consultant for a few days, and I said yes.

G: Now let me clarify this. Was General Lansdale still working for Defense at this time, or was he retired and working for State, or do you recall?

W: As I remember he was in uniform. And in the Pentagon.

G: Okay.

W: So I'd say he was with Defense. And I did that. While I was there, someone--and I don't know who it was, but anyway, I was sent down into the bowels of the Pentagon where Max Taylor and Burke, Admiral Burke--

G: Arleigh Burke?

W: Yes. And Bob Kennedy were investigating the debacle of the Bay of Pigs, and I was given a desk in a small room there, and they started

throwing large, manila envelopes at me--larger than I'd ever seen before, at least two feet by two feet square--and on the upper left-hand corner, they had on there the White House, and down at the bottom it was addressed to--if I remember correctly--General Taylor. These were plans, contingency plans. And I was told to go through those plans and to make comments as to whether or not they were up to date, or if they were workable or whatnot and so forth. So that's what I started doing.

G: Now what did these contingency plans--what were they for? What contingencies were they for?

W: Fighting anyplace in the damn world that you could think of, as I remember.

G: Okay. All right. These were not specifically Vietnam?

W: No. But my memory is vague.

G: General military situation.

W: That's right.

G: All right.

W: And at first, I was going about it in very careful manner and making detailed comments, and finally it got to the degree I would take one of them, glance at it, scan it, and write across it "Obsolete. Worthless," and throw it back out.

G: Were they so bad? Were they that far out of date?

W: Yes. To me they were, yes. And while I was doing that, I was called out one day, and Bob Kennedy and Taylor were there--Burke was not--and Kennedy started asking me questions about Vietnam.

G: Can you recall any detail of these questions?

W: No.

G: What was he after? What was he trying to--

W: I don't know. When he got through asking questions--Taylor didn't say anything, he just sat there and listened. Kennedy started out by saying, "I've heard a great deal about you, and I want to ask you some questions." I said, "Okay." And, of course, I must admit, I didn't look upon Bob Kennedy with the great reverence that some people did. To me he was just another young man. The fact that his brother was President of the United States and he'd been appointed Attorney General didn't make a damn bit of difference to me. He looked like he might be a very young Major in the army, as far as I was concerned, which was possibly a wrong attitude to take, but it wasn't anything disrespectful. But I didn't look upon him as one of America's great heroes, martyrs, as he turned out to be, unfortunately.

But anyway, he asked me a lot of questions, and when he got through, he said to Taylor, "I've learned more about Vietnam from General Williams than I have from anyone else since I've been in this headquarters, in the Pentagon." And he said, "Don't let that man get away." Then as he went out the door he said to me, "As I've said before, I've heard about you, and you're supposed to be a pretty hard person. How would you like to go to Vietnam as ambassador?" And I said, "I wouldn't like it at all." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, I'm not a professional foreign affairs officer, and

when political appointees go in jobs like that, the State Department old hands tear them apart." I said, "They'd crucify me before I'd been there six months." And I said, "That's the only reason why I think it would be wrong for me to go out there as an ambassador." Frankly, I doubt seriously he had the slightest intention of me ever going out there as ambassador, but, hell, you can't tell from the people that they have appointed.

G: Now, let me ask you this. Since you express that opinion, what did you think when Max Taylor went as ambassador? Because clearly the same objections would apply.

W: No, Max was a politician in addition to being a superior army officer. Max is a very astute politician, and his association was so close with the Kennedy family--they named one of the children after him--that the foreign affairs cadre over in the State Department couldn't have touched him. I don't think they could. They may have; I don't know. Well, anyway, I guess I was a little bold when he said, "I've heard about you, and you're supposed to be a pretty tough nut to crack." He said, "How would you like to go out and be ambassador to Vietnam? I said I didn't want to. And I said, "Now, as far as being a tough nut's concerned, you're getting a pretty good reputation yourself." I said, "All I hear is that you're one of the hardest people around Washington, D.C." And I said, "If people are calling and referring to me as an old son of a bitch now," I said, "they're going to be calling you one at the same time, if they're not already doing it." Kennedy looked at me

and laughed, and said, "Adios" or something like that and walked out the door. He seemed to be a very pleasant fellow. Now I wouldn't say that that was asking me for advice, but no one else ever did.

Now, I will say this, that after [General Creighton] Abrams became the CG in Vietnam--

G: Now this would be about the summer of 1968, wouldn't it? I believe that's correct, because [General William] Westmoreland came back about June of 1968.

W: Okay. It would be after that. Well, then, maybe it was before he became CG. But we had a mutual friend. An officer that had served with me quite often. He retired--major general, he's dead--and he had served with me in Vietnam, too, and I knew Abrams fairly well. Abrams and I had known each other some time. We weren't intimate friends, but we were pretty close to it, and I'd known him since Germany. I knew he was busy, and I never was presumptuous enough to write him and tell him that he should do this, that and another, but I had a friend that was on his staff that was very close to him, so when I had ideas I'd write this friend of mine and say, "Next time you're talking to Abe, you might suggest this, that and another. And whether you attribute it to me is immaterial, but it might be something for him to think about." And sooner or later I'd get back word, well, Abe bought it or he didn't buy it.

G: Do any of these stand out in your mind, any of your suggestions or ideas?

W: None that I'd care to talk about now. Both these people are dead, and the war's over. But I didn't think the war was being fought properly, but I also didn't believe that Abrams had much control over it. I didn't believe that CINCPAC had a hell of a lot of control over it, nor the U.S. Army of the Pacific, and I think now historically we know it was controlled almost entirely from the Oval Room at the White House and was terribly bitched up. There's where I cross with you and your friends, or the people that employ you. But--

G: Well, you won't cross us. That man is dead and gone, too, after all. (Laughter)

W: Yes, but this all goes into his building.

Now, not long ago, Roche, who used to be a terrible liberal and has changed considerably--

G: You're speaking of John Roche, now?

W: Yes--made a remark in one of his columns that he walked into the Oval Room one day, and there was Lyndon Johnson and Bus [Earle G.] Wheeler and McNamara fussing over a damn map on the wall, deciding which one was going to stick a pin in to show where the next bombing target was going to be. Well, that's absolutely ridiculous. You can't fight a war that way, and we found it out. We got ourselves in a terrible jam. If you read--I don't know whether you have time to do it or not--but if you read some of the analysis now of our air force activities during the Vietnamese War, you'll find out that our B-29s that, or 52s, whatever those biggest bombers were, that

were flying out of Guam, very, very small per cent of those--less than 5 per cent ever bombed North Vietnam. They were bombing in South Vietnam. On the other hand, we were taking fighter bombers and sending them up to North Vietnam and losing aviators almost every day. That was mismanagement, entirely mismanagement.

Some of these aviators have written, and it's been published in such a thing as the Armed Forces Journal and other military publications--I think I'm quoting the Armed Forces Journal correctly--where that some of the very senior officers in the air force, or at least the field grade officers resigned because of the damn ridiculous orders they were getting as naval aviators flying off of carriers and going over Hanoi. I remember reading one of them not too long ago where he said that on such-a-such a night they went in there and not a plane was allowed to carry a bomb; the only thing that they could carry was flares. And he talked about their losses and so forth. Hell, you can't fight a war like that. We would have won that war easier than I could drive from here to San Antonio--city of San Antonio--if they'd let us alone. Now, if Westmoreland couldn't have done it, they could have jerked him and put someone in there that could have done it. They had plenty of people could have done it. Abrams could have done it.

Stop to think how ridiculous this is. Now an army officer of some experience, Abrams didn't even command the air force in Vietnam. He didn't command the damn marines; he didn't command anything but army. Westmoreland was the same. You had no unified commander. Even

President Diem--when I was told in the greatest confidence to find out what President Diem thought about unified command--I asked him--and I was told never to let anyone know I did it. Well, hell, that's so long ago it doesn't make any difference now. But anyway, he didn't know what unified command was, and I started in back in World War I and told him how the Allies had to finally decide on General Foch to be commander, to coordinate things and how in World War II, why, we had a unified command down in Africa, and finally in France we had unified command with General Eisenhower operating with [Omar] Bradley and [Bernard] Montgomery as subordinates.

I said, "Now, that's unified command. Now, if we have a fight here, and American troops come in, is everyone going to go and have their own show or are we going to have one man in command and let him fight the damn war?" I said, "Now, our concept is that, like Eisenhower's headquarters at least--so I was told--that if you have an American commander, you have a deputy that's opposite. For instance, Eisenhower's deputy was a man named [Arthur] Tedder; he was a British flier." And I said, "Right on down the line. If we have a war over here, if you have a Vietnamese commander, then you ought to have an American deputy commander or vice versa." Diem said, "Who would do that?" I said, "If the fight's tomorrow, it'll be me. How long that'll last, I don't know. He said, "If it starts tomorrow," he said, "you'll be commander." He said, "You'll command Vietnamese forces as far as I'm concerned." Well, hell, we would have sold on that thing. Lord, goodness, here and

I've passed that on to people that told me to get the answer to that question, who were military people. But, by George, we ended up--the army commander over there commanded army, the navy commander commanded navy, the air force commander commanded air force--and hell, who in the world organized and coordinated? Nobody. You can't fight a war that way, and we found it out.

G: And the ARVN went one way and we went another way.

W: Absolutely. Absolutely. There was no [coordination]. You can't saddle that on Abe. You can't saddle it on Westmoreland, except I think Westmoreland should have objected to it strenuously. And there was so damn much jealousy, I can't think it was anything but jealousy that CINCPAC would not realize that someone on the ground should be commanding there and not back at CINCPAC or back at the U.S. Army Pacific.

G: My impression is that once the war heated up that CINCPAC virtually got shoved out of the circuit and maybe it was--

W: I'm afraid they did.

G: --between JCS and Commander, MACV.

W: I'm afraid they did. We have had American aviators publish articles in which they said they'd be on carrier, and a telephone conversation would come through directly from the President of the United States to a carrier telling them what they're going to do on their next flights out. Well now, my Lord, you could say that as much as this nation idolizes George Washington, hell, old George Washington couldn't have done that. It's impossible. So that's where we lost.

Now then, where did Vietnam get its bad name? Okay, they started their draft, or they had their draft going and the draft didn't work properly. If a kid had money enough to go to school or any reason to get excused from the draft, he got excused from the draft. Thousands of them went to Canada; that paid off because later when the administration, another administration came in, that said, "King's X. Everything's free. Come on back." Okay. Now we had a lot of kids going to school and they said, "All right, I'm in school because I'm a student. All right, I'm going to graduate next year. What the hell, the army going to get me?" Well, the best way to stop that is to start bitching about the war. So your students started, and they were ably assisted by all agitators, both pink and red as well as white. All these agitators immediately helped them, and the first thing you know all the students throughout the United States were saying what a horrible thing Vietnam is. First thing you know you have the entire American public mind poisoned about Vietnam. That's why I was very glad to see Mr. Reagan come out the other day and said it wasn't criminal to be a soldier in Vietnam during the war. Well, that's just an old soldier's viewpoint of things.

G: I want to ask you a wide-open question.

W: Okay.

G: Will you compare the performance of the country team under Ambassadors [G. Frederick] Reinhardt and Durbrow?

W: Yes.

G: Would you do that for me?

W: Yes. Under Mr. Reinhardt we had a good, working country team as far as I could tell, and we had no dissension. I never knew of any serious dissension taking place there. It was just the difference between daylight and dark. Now, I don't say that because Reinhardt and I were personal friends, we were not. We were on good speaking terms, but he was the ambassador, he represented the country. I never saw him do anything that would cause me as an American to be embarrassed, and I never saw him get up, for instance, in front of a mixed crowd and strip down to his shorts and put on a belly dance. Vulgar things like that. Reinhardt was a gentleman, and he conducted himself as such. At parties and so forth, if he got up to give a toast, he got up and read a toast off a card that he'd written in French. Everyone accepted it, and he was just what I considered a top-rate American ambassador.

G: Very professional?

W: Very professional, and I thought very understanding. Now, that doesn't mean to say that Reinhardt and I didn't have differences, but any differences we had were absolutely minor. He phoned me one time, "Tanks are going by my quarters over here, been going by here for an hour--going down to the docks, being loaded up. The French are shipping all these tanks out." He said, "Why don't you stop them?" I said, "Fine. The French have the bayonets; I don't have any," and hung up. That's all there was to it. The French had a regiment of Foreign Legionnaires right there. They could do anything

they wanted to, and they did do anything they wanted to. Mr. [John Foster] Dulles came over there. I told him, "The French are stealing us blind." He says, "Hell, I know it. There's nothing unusual about that," or words to that effect.

Anything that Reinhardt and I ever had differences on amounted to nothing. I had quite a bit of admiration for him. No one would disparagingly refer to him as a "ladies shoe salesman."

G: How did things change when Ambassador Durbrow came in?

W: Well, I don't think I can elaborate on that any more than I have already. I think they got petty. If Reinhardt had been strongly adverse to President Ngo Dinh Diem, he never indicated it in my presence. I'm sure that none of the American staff there--I'm talking about USIS and the CIA and USOM, certainly not MAAG--if anyone had any idea that he was violently opposed to the Vietnamese or to the regime of President Diem, he gave no indication of it by word or action in my presence at any time. He conducted country team meetings in a professional manner.

G: Do you think the difference between Reinhardt and Durbrow was a matter of policy or personality?

W: I think, well, I'd start off first by thinking it was personality, or it could be that Durbrow was getting new instructions from stateside or maybe he wasn't. Maybe his messages back stateside were written in such a way that State could take them this way or that way because I, when I got my hands on them, I used to study those things line by line and paragraph by paragraph and often when I'd

get through with a couple of pages of a dispatch that had been sent back there, I couldn't tell what the hell--whether he was for or against the subject.

G: You didn't ordinarily see the dispatches between State and the Ambassador.

W: No.

G: Did you see them under Reinhardt?

W: Yes, as far as I know.

G: But that stopped with Durbrow? Was that abrupt?

W: I don't know whether it was abrupt or not. I never had any occasion to question anything that was put out under Reinhardt. There could have been things that I didn't know about, wasn't familiar with, but I became very cognizant under Durbrow because--here's an instance that occurred which I thought was not exactly right. The chief of staff of CINCPAC sent me a message and said, "We want your detailed analysis, comments, et cetera of a message sent by the embassy to State Department, number such-and-such on such-and-such a date. Soonest." I called for it; we didn't have it in MAAG files. I picked up the telephone and called the embassy and I said, "Do you have such-and-such a communication?" "Well, let us check. Yes, we do." I said, "Will you furnish me a copy of it?" "Yes, we'll send you a copy." Now, who I was talking to, I don't know--some clerk up there. So they sent me a copy of it, and I sat down and read that thing, page after page, with utter amazement. So I sat

down, in longhand myself, and wrote out almost sentence by sentence my objection to the concept that had been advanced in this--

G: Do you recall what the substance of the matter was?

W: No. It was a policy paper. And when I got through, I had it typed up and proofread it and so forth and signed it and sent it to CINCPAC. The first thing I knew, the Ambassador phoned me and said, "We have a message from State Department saying that they don't entirely agree with my letter of such-and-such a date, and furthermore, you don't either." And I said, "Is that such-and-such?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "Why did you comment on it?" I said, "I had a direct order from CINCPAC to comment on it and direct it to them soonest without delay. I asked your office for a copy of it, and they gave me a copy, and I sat down and made my comments and sent them in."

Then he issued an order, a directive. It was really a whopper. He said, "Hereafter, you will send no communication of any importance to CINCPAC or any other headquarters outside of Vietnam without it being proofread and approved by this headquarters, by this embassy. I said, "All right, but you want to remember that I may get instructions to answer a communication by fastest method possible, and that means that I'm going to get an answer out within less than twenty-four hours. If I sent it up here for you to proofread and approve, and you let it lay on your desk for two or three days or a week or so--which has happened in the past on various papers that I've presented," I said, "that's going to get me into a terrible jam."

He said, "I'll take care of that." So, after that, anytime that I sent to a high headquarters a comment on anything or any paper of any importance at all, I had to send it to the embassy and get it initialed by the Ambassador before I could dispatch it. And sometimes that would be anywhere from twenty-four hours to ten, fifteen days.

G: What did CINCPAC think of that?

W: They told me not to pay any attention to the Ambassador's directive.

G: That kind of puts you between a rock and a hard place.

W: Yes. But you see, CINCPAC was my immediate military superior. And here you see a MAAG chief is put in a delicate position. He has a military superior that's giving him orders, he's got a civilian superior that's giving him orders, and no man--the Bible says it--can serve two masters at one time. And anytime you try it, you're going to get in a jam.

Now, I found out that this was not an isolated case. I had people visit me from Japan and the Philippines and people I could trust and talk to--army officers--and I'd say, "What the hell goes on here?" I said, "This situation here is outlandish." I said, "We're just at each other all the time, and I get some of the craziest orders that a person could conceive of." And any number of times, well, several times, they said, "Why, you don't know half the story." "Why, you're getting along fine down here." "You ought to see what's happening between the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG up in Tokyo." Or they said, "Do you have any idea what's

going on between the Ambassador and the Chief of MAAG over in Manila?" I said, "It couldn't be worse than this." "It's much worse." So I thought to myself, "Well, that's something the American government's got to work out; that's beyond me."

G: General, looking back now, do you see any turning points, any crucial decision, any point in time during your tour in Vietnam when you were still there, that you wish had happened differently or that you wish you had done differently? Anything crucial, anything that stands out in your mind at all.

W: No, I can't think of any one thing. I've often said that anytime there's trouble between two people, or two headquarters, probably both are partially responsible. One might be more responsible than the other, but the other's going to be partially responsible. So I thought many times, "What could I have done to have kept better relations between MAAG and the embassy?"

G: And you're speaking of Durbrow's tenure now?

W: Yes. And I don't know what in the world I could have done and still carried out the orders that I had, the directive I had when I went over there. Then too, I've often wondered why I wasn't able to make an impression on Big Minh and Don and those people that would have lasted longer than three years. I had a letter--first of all, when I left there, President Diem told me that he was soon inviting me back to visit Vietnam as a guest of the country. And I had a letter from him to that extent after I'd been home about a year, and it said, "You'll hear from me through the Vietnamese embassy." Well,

I never did hear from him, or I never did hear from the Vietnamese embassy. Now, I'm sure that if he sent such an invitation, it was stopped on purpose by the V.N. Ambassador who's on a different side of the fence from myself.

I had at least one Vietnamese officer, general, of some importance write me one time--prior to the coup--and said, "You promised that you were coming back, and if you're coming, you must come soon. You have been gone too long now." Or words to that effect, see? And I thought to myself, "Well, now, if I had taken the bull by the horns and realized that it was possible that the Vietnamese Ambassador or the American Ambassador was keeping me from going back over there, I should have applied for a visa and gone over on my own and talked to these generals and said, 'What's going on here? I've been gone too long. What the hell are you people plotting?'"

Now, this is going to sound egotistical as hell, but it's possible that if I had had enough foresight to do that, or enough intelligence to do that, or enough get-up-and-go to do it, I could have stopped something. I might have stopped that coup d'etat, then--carry my theory on--if Diem had lived, had stopped the damn war and saved how many thousands of American soldiers that were killed in Vietnam.

G: But could you have made any difference with Lodge in the picture in the way that he was?

W: I doubt it seriously, but maybe I could have neutralized him, if that's the proper word. I wouldn't have attempted to confront Lodge.

I would merely have talked to the Vietnamese. How strong, what kind of hold he had on the Vietnamese, I don't know. I don't believe he had very much. But he could have.

The other day, you were asking me a question about Lansdale, and I said I hadn't corresponded with him very often. And cogitating on that, I wondered if you had something particular in mind, because I think maybe that I've corresponded with Lansdale more than my answer may have indicated. I don't know exactly what I did answer you when you asked me about Lansdale.

G: I asked you if you had much contact with him after he went back to the States in 1956, and the reason I ask is because I know that he was continuing to work on Vietnamese problems while he was in Washington, and I thought perhaps that had been an occasion for you to correspond.

W: Well, we have corresponded. Not over anything of particular importance that I can remember.

G: I was thinking specifically of the time when you were in Vietnam between, well, I guess about 1957 and 1960. I thought perhaps there was an official connection there, since he was continuing to work on Vietnam back in Washington.

W: No. We have corresponded to this extent. He writes to me occasionally, I write to him. His wife died; he wrote and told me about it. He married one of the people that worked for him when he was over there. He's very happy with his new life. I think he's consulted by the Military History Division of the Department of

Army at times; it's run by a brigadier general by the name of [James L.] Collins.

Incidentally, you asked me a question here one time that I could have elaborated on. Collins's people have been down here; one of them came down here and spent a week at least going through my files and xeroxing records and taking them up there. I don't have much to do with them anymore because I've lost faith in them. They sent me a draft and said they were preparing a history on Vietnam, and they sent me a draft covering the period 1954 to 1960 and said, "If you have any changes or suggestions, make them on the margin, and we'd appreciate it."

Well, I mulled over that a little while and I sit down at this old typewriter and took out some foolscap paper and wrote them five or six pages, almost paragraph by paragraph of what they'd said was wrong and what I thought was wrong and sent it back to them. Then I wrote to an officer up there, an ex-officer that I'd known that had written some books and had been kind enough to send me an autographed copy--and I think his name was [Charles] MacDonald. Does that name mean anything to you? I told him, "If you're still with that outfit up there, you sure better do some looking around. I've got this thing down here and I've written a number of pages." I said, "The stuff that the historical section put out on World War II," I said, "I used some of those things as reference datas." Well, hell, here's one of them right here, for instance. That's Rearming the French. That's put out by that office.

I said, "That's some of the best stuff I ever read. Beside [that] this thing that they sent down here is atrocious. And if that office can't do as good as it did on World War II, I think you ought to do something about it." He wrote back and told me, "We have examined your comments. We had a murder board here, and your comments were discussed, and we've decided, in view of your comments and others--"and he didn't say who the others were-- "that the work was not of satisfactory stature, and we've given the historian twelve months to rewrite." And he says, "I can assure you that when we do publish, it'll be as good as anything we published on World War II, or it won't be published at all." "Sincerely and cordially" and so forth, and that's the last I heard.

But I heard no more about that. Then I got another letter from some other man--I don't know who he was, I don't remember his name--he said, "We're making a pictorial history of the Vietnamese War and we find that we have no pictures for our pictorial history prior to 1960, and we're about to go to press. Can you furnish me any pictures that could be included in such a volume?" Well, I wrote back and I said, "I'm sure that I have a lot of pictures here, filed away in this place and that and another, but I have none immediately available." And I said, "Here's two or three that are available, and I'll send those to you." And I sent them to him, and I got back an answer. He said, "Well, these are fine and we'll hold them and see whether we use them or not, but we were looking for

something less formal." He said, "We're about to go to press until we discovered here that we had nothing prior to 1960." So I wrote back and I said, "How in the hell can you put out a pictorial history of South Vietnam and have it start some time in 1960?" I said, "You remember the French fought a war out there, and we got our nose in it in 1954, and that's six years before your history begins."

G: I was going to say you need to go back to about 1945, I would say, if you want to pick it up at the beginning.

W: So that's the last of those people, and as I say, I've lost faith in them. So when they start talking about records--other people have talked to me about records. People at the University of Texas, egged on by some of my University of Texas alumni friends, communicated with me, and I answered their letters and so forth, and they suggested eventually that I put my files down in the University of Texas museum at El Paso, Texas. One of my very good friends was Slam Marshall. His records are there. Then for some reason or another, somehow or another, the Hoover Institution of War, Peace and Revolution got hold of my name out at Stanford, and they wrote me a letter, and I started corresponding with them, and I ended up by shipping lock, stock and barrel.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

Addendum

W: As this is the end of this interview let me summarize by repeating that when I was sent to South Vietnam in 1955 my Directive was a) to organize, train, and equip a South Vietnamese army, navy, and air force; b) that I was to support the regime of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

This Directive was not changed during my tour in Vietnam which was extended from the normal two year tour to five years.

I would be remiss if I did not include remarks about the U.S. military personnel assigned to help me as Chief of MAAG. Without exception the officers, NCO's, and soldiers assigned by the army, the navy and the marines, and the air force, especially the army, were of a high calibre. Far above the average. Several of the army officers went on to higher rank and some eventually retired as general officers. More should have.

We had no disciplinary problems among the U.S. military and the use of drugs or the excessive use of liquor was unknown. No commander could have asked for better help. The problem was the numbers were inadequate for the tasks at hand. This shortage was not corrected until several years after I'd left Vietnam.