INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: SAMUEL A. ADAMS

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: I think we can begin. Mr. Adams, what is your background professionally? Where did you receive your education?

A: I went to Harvard College, graduating in class of 1955. Then I was in the navy for three and a half years. After that I went to a couple of years of Harvard Law School from which I did not graduate, then spent a year working at a bank and then joined the CIA. Gave you too much.

G: No, that's fine. What drew you to the CIA?

A: I joined the CIA I believe it was in March of 1963.

G: Were you recruited? Did you apply? How does that work?

A: No, I just applied. I had just moved to Washington, was looking for a job, really didn't know too much about the CIA, and it accepted me and I joined up.

G: And you were trained as an analyst, is that correct?

A: Well, I joined this thing called the Junior Officer Training Program, which was sort of a management trainee thing that lasted about seven or eight months, and you got a little bit of everything, stuff that the clandestine services did, some training in analysis, but analysis is really not something you can be trained in. You either do it or you don't do it.

G: In a sense you spend your whole life getting ready to be an analyst.

A: Yes, right. Absolutely. Sure.

G: When did you begin working on Vietnam?

A: Early August 1965.

G: Is this essentially what you said in the Harper's article?

A: I think so, yes. There's some minor errors in the Harper's article as to time and dates because I did it off the top of my head, but what I say now is probably going to be more accurate than the Harper's article.

G: Okay. Since the context of all of this is the CBS special which was done I think in January of 1982--is that right?

A: 1982. Yes.

G: --which is titled "The Uncounted Enemy," I think, let me ask you a conceptual question that has to do with the title. Who was the enemy in Vietnam?

A: A good question. In fact, it brings up the title of my book, which hasn't been published yet, which is called Who The Hell Are We Fighting Out There?. This of course is the question we had at the time and the question that the TV show addressed. Basically I guess you'd say that what we were fighting out there was a large, communist-directed organization run out of Hanoi, which considered Vietnam one country and which controlled everything north of the DMZ as a government and which had a shadow government south of the DMZ. I suppose you would say that our enemy in Vietnam was everybody north of the

[seventeenth] parallel and those belonging to the communist organization south of the parallel. The question that the documentary addressed, and which I used to address when I was working on the subject back between 1965 and 1973, was who south of the parallel do you count as enemies?

G: Who did we count? Who should we have counted?

A: When I began work on Vietnam, which was in August 1965, MACV had an order of battle which contained Viet Cong soldiers, North Vietnamese soldiers, it contained Viet Cong guerrillas in what was called self-defense militia, and it contained what it called Viet Cong political cadres. I worked basically on Viet Cong manpower right from the beginning although I was working on VC morale right off the bat. And it seemed to me that the definition that they had at the time of who to count was fairly adequate. There is obviously a question when you're fighting in Vietnam who to count in the various categories. However, as far as the military categories were concerned, the regulars, the service troops, the guerrillas and the militia men, these were all soldiers, military personnel, whatever you call it, which the communists recognized as belonging to their army. The political cadres, the so-called infrastructure, was a cloudier organization, and with them it became a question of where to draw the line on who to count and who not to count. In the army, it was pretty clear who to count, because it was carried in their personnel rosters.

G: Okay. Part of the argument seems to me centered over the military

threat that any one of these categories represented. How serious was your disagreement with MACV over this facet of the thing?

A: Well, there was no disagreement at all up until I would say about June 1967 as to who to count. The MACV command, then under the command, as far as intelligence went, of Major General Joseph McChristian, counted the people I've just talked about. And there was no serious argument at that time as to who to count and who was in the categories. There were arguments which had not yet come to a head over how many to count within the categories, but the categories themselves were not a matter of dispute. It only became a matter of dispute after McChristian left.

G: I see. Were these things tied together, McChristian leaving and the dispute arising?

A: Basically yes. I didn't know at the time because I didn't even know who McChristian was except having seen him once at a conference sort of sweep in and sweep out. But I was to discover later that all the troubles I was to have concerning the problem of who to count arose in a serious manner after McChristian left.

G: So you tie the two events together now?

A: Yes, very closely. And Colonel Gains Hawkins, who was head of the MACV J-2 order of battle section, that is the section charged with counting the number of enemy soldiers and political cadres, also says that his life was perfectly all right until McChristian left and that the troubles began basically when General [Phillip] Davidson took over.

G: What difference did General Davidson make?

A: Well, the difference that General Davidson made was that he began, in the first instance, to argue that certain categories be dropped from the strength estimate. The categories at first were what were called the self-defense militia and the secret self-defense militia. And he began making this argument virtually the day that McChristian left; in fact there was a cable from the CIA station to the CIA headquarters on the day McChristian left saying that J-2 now felt that the self-defense militia ought to be dropped from the strength estimate. This was just one of many arguments that developed over the summer. It seems to be the one that everybody is most interested in, but there were a lot of other arguments as well.

G: How big a difference would this make in the numbers?

A: Well, there were about one hundred and twenty thousand self-defense militiamen and secret self-defense militiamen, and that's the difference it made. Everybody agreed that there were that number more or less at that period of time. But the question was whether they should be taken out of the order of battle or not.

G: How strongly did you feel that they should not be taken out?

A: I felt fairly strongly at the time for a number of reasons, which reasons incidentally Hawkins and General McChristian agreed with. I suppose the most important single one was that the prime job of the self-defense militia was to lay mines and booby traps, and here's why that's important. In World War II, for example, when we were fighting a conventional war, something on the order of 3 per cent of American

casualties were caused by mines and booby traps. In the Vietnam War, 33 per cent were caused by mines and booby traps, ten, eleven times higher. It seemed to me that if you have a group of people that are planting a device which caused one-third of our casualties, this group of people ought to be counted as enemies. Now let me say here that they didn't plant every single mine and booby trap in Vietnam, but they planted probably the bulk of them.

G: Okay. The effect of marching these people out, I think as one phrase has it, of the order of battle would have been a significant lowering then of the total number.

A: Yes, that's right.

G: And you have said that Gains Hawkins agreed with you on this issue.

A: Yes. Both Hawkins and McChristian have said a number of times, repeatedly in fact, that they thought that the self-defense belonged in the OB. Other people who agree to that, virtually every infantryman I've ever talked to who has operated in a populated area, where people were, where the self-defense militia were, because your average American infantry platoon going through a Viet Cong village basically was walking on tiptoes. They walked at about half a mile an hour at best, their eyes on the ground waiting for the next explosion. And you had some areas where--up in My Lai, for example, during the time of the so-called My Lai massacre in March of 1968, [William] Calley's outfit--let me put that differently. The percentage of American casualties in that area due to the mines and booby traps was something

over 80 per cent, so you had some areas where this is what the war was.

G: Right. Okay. All of this was taking place within the context of the attempt to reach an agreement on a Special National Intelligence Estimate, is that correct, SNIE?

A: That's right. National Intelligence Estimate 14.3-67.

G: Which eventually got written and signed off on I think in November of 1967.

A: That's right, November 13.

G: Something like six months past when it should have been written.

A: Well, there's no set time for it to be signed but normally those things only take a couple of weeks to get written and signed off on.

G: What was your input into SNIE 14.3-67? Where in there are your views represented?

A: Well, the original draft of 14.3-67 was distributed on the fourteenth of June 1967. The drafter of that first draft was a guy by the name of Bobby Layton, who still works for the CIA.

G: L-A-Y-T-O-N?

A: L-A-Y-T-O-N. And it's Bobby, it's not Robert. Bobby Layton. He's been on the public record on this one, I'm not revealing a CIA agent. In fact, he gave our side, the CBS side, an affidavit. At any rate, Layton basically incorporated my views concerning Viet Cong manpower, which was only one of the subjects in the NIE, into the first draft of the NIE. Then the first meeting of the NIE was on the twenty-third of June 1967, and there were a whole bunch of meetings on the estimate

from then until practically the signing of the meeting [estimate?] on the thirteenth of November 1967. As far as I know I attended every one of those, defending what was at first a CIA view and my view and then what was increasingly my view.

G: Are you saying that you progressively were more isolated in this position?

A: Basically what happened was that the CIA--there was a lot of pressure from the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, [William] Westmoreland's command, over the numbers. Basically the CIA, in the person of George Carver, the phrase we use is caved in to military demands in September 1967. As he put it in a cable to Richard Helms dated the thirteenth of September 1967--Carver being in Saigon, Helms being back in Washington--"We have decided to drop the self-defense militia from the order of battle and not to quantify them," in other words don't hang a number on them. And he said that this was a "major concession," and major concession is a direct quote out of the cable to MACV. And he underlined to Helms that that's what he was doing. After that, sort of the CIA official view and mine parted because I thought they shouldn't have been dropped from the OB.

G: You didn't make the concession, in other words?

A: I did not make the concession, no.

G: Okay. Did you continue to represent your view in official meetings and so forth?

A: Well, after [between?] the signing of the NIE, which was on the thirteenth of November 1967, and the Tet offensive, which hit on the

thirtieth of January 1968, I sort of went back to my hole with my captured documents and POW reports and continued working on Viet Cong and NVA strength and found, incidentally, that there was an enormous number of new units popping up all over the place which weren't reflected in the order of battle. Tet hit, and I might say that during this time I was sort of isolated in the sense that I wasn't going outside to anybody else's meetings, although within the CIA I was always running around waving pieces of paper and writing internal memoranda. But this period, this hiatus between the thirteenth of November and the thirtieth of January was basically one in which my views were heard internally but not outside the building. Then Tet hit and my views became popular again, and in fact the CIA readopted the numbers which had been carried prior to the so-called cave-in of September 1967. What they were doing, of course, was not readopting just Sam Adams' views, but it was the views of Colonel Hawkins and of McChristian and myself and of all the order of battle people who were working on the subject.

G: So there was a reassessment?

A: There was a reassessment after Tet, yes. I started lobbying for it the day Tet hit. Tet was hours old when I was already saying we ought to reopen the order of battle dispute. I think it was on February 11, 1968 that Carver cabled the Saigon station telling the Saigon station that we intended basically to reopen the order of battle dispute. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, and there was another order of battle conference, post-Tet, began on the tenth of April and lasted

for a few days, in which basically the CIA readopted the old view of the enemy structure and how big it was.

G: This post-Tet conference, where did this take place?

A: It took place on the seventh floor at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

G: Was this an internal CIA meeting?

A: No, it was not, it had a number of people involved in it. There was the CIA, which was represented--by this time the so-called Adams position was the CIA position, and there was a whole line-up of CIA analysts on the CIA side. Representing MACV was the then-Colonel Daniel Graham, a captain called Kelly Robinson, a marine colonel called Paul Weiler, and a navy commander called James Meacham.

G: How would you spell Weiler, do you know?

A: W-E-I-L-E-R, Weiler.

G: Okay. What was MACV's position?

A: MACV's position was that the lower numbers were still accurate. The self-defense militias still belonged out of the order of battle and that all our higher numbers for the other categories were way too high. I might add that the self-defense militia question was only one of a large number of questions. Virtually we were fighting for higher numbers on every single category. I have since found out information, and this was reflected in "The Uncounted Enemy," the TV documentary, that MACV was arbitrarily lowering numbers in the other categories other than the self-defense militia.

G: Such as main force elements?

A: Such as main force, local force, service troops, political cadres, guerrillas.

G: How had the figures been affected by the reported numbers of enemy casualties during Tet?

A: Well, here's where a very interesting phenomenon took place. This again is reflected in now sworn testimony by a couple of people that worked on the subject, on the so-called manpower balance. If you accepted MACV claims for the number of enemy killed, and applied these losses against the official MACV order of battle, the official MACV order of battle disappeared. There's nobody left. This is reflected, and I now believe quite accurately, in Herbert Schandler's book called The Unmaking of a President. And I'm now going to paraphrase a quote which can be found in Schandler's book, so you know where to check what the exact quote was.

On the twenty-fifth of March 1967 there was a meeting of the so-called Wise Men, which were LBJ's unofficial advisers, and the briefing took place in the State Department. The Wise Men, some thirteen in number, including ex-Justice Arthur Goldberg, were briefed by three people: Phil Habib, William DePuy, and George Carver. It took place in the evening around a table. And [I'll] skip Habib's and Carver's briefings, although Carver was arguing now for the higher strength estimate. DePuy's briefing, part of it went something to the effect, well, we have killed eighty thousand Viet Cong so far, Viet Cong-NVA, and the fighting continues, and this is out of a strength of some two hundred forty thousand of the Viet Cong. And he went on and gave

another part of his briefing apparently, when in effect Goldberg said, "Hold the phone here. Wait a minute. Let's go over this. The size of the official order of battle is some two hundred forty thousand, is that correct, General?" And General DePuy said yes. He said, "You've killed eighty thousand of them according to your statistics, is that correct?" "Yes, sir, that's correct." "Now, General, you have been in combat," which DePuy had,"in your opinion how many wounded are there for every man killed?" and DePuy said "Well, about ten." And he said, "Well, let's assume that the Viet Cong"--this is Arthur Goldberg talking--"are less solicitous of their wounded than we are of ours and there are only three seriously wounded for every killed. Does that sound fair, General?" And DePuy said, "Yes, it does." And Goldberg said, "Well, okay, I'm not much of a mathematician, but if you have eighty thousand killed and there are three wounded for every man killed, that means there are two hundred forty thousand wounded plus eighty thousand killed for a total of three hundred twenty thousand out of an order of battle of two hundred forty. Who the hell are we fighting out there?" which again is the title of my book. This basically is the answer to your question. The heavy losses at Tet just couldn't be explained if you used the lower numbers.

G: Did you do any work on the Tet offensive itself, the nature of it, enemy goals, who the troops were that were used and so on?

A: Yes, I did a fair amount of work at the time.

G: At the time?

A: Yes. Ironically, I was working--there are two things in intelligence when you're working in a war: enemy intentions and enemy capabilities. That is, what does the enemy intend to do, what has he got to do it with. I was working primarily on enemy capabilities, but it just happens that prior to the Tet offensive, in fact, Thanksgiving Day 1967, a guy by the name of Joe Hovey--that's H-O-V-E-Y--was working in Saigon and he put together a bunch of captured documents and prisoner reports and came to the conclusion that there was going to be an enormous offensive coming up sometime after the first of the year, and that it would hit the cities, and basically Hovey hit the nail right on the head.

The irony was that I was sitting back in Carver's office, Carver being what was called special assistant to Vietnamese affairs to the CIA Director, Richard Helms, and after Hovey's memo came in after Thanksgiving Day 1967, he said basically, "Adams, I want you to follow this subject, too." So I became not only the CIA analyst in charge of Viet Cong manpower capabilities, but also in that particular subject, the analyst in charge of their intentions. It was just a fluke. So here I was, sitting on this Hovey memo, which is absolutely possibly one of the best intelligence memos written during the Vietnam War, calling the Viet Cong Tet offensive, what was about to happen and telling what was about to happen as if he'd written it after the event rather than before. I was sitting with this thing, and then all I knew of Viet Cong capabilities, it was really quite an experience to

be sort of this person that was working on both subjects at that particular time in the Vietnam War.

G: Do you know what became of that report, Hovey's report?

A: Yes, I know in detail what happened to it. It came to Carver's office right after Thanksgiving. It got batted around the CIA for coordination. It got dumped on by the current intelligence office who said they can't dream of doing something like this. My comments on it, I didn't really have too much expertise on it right when it first arrived, was that this is all very well but there are twice as many of them out there to do it with, and I stuck that comment on it. But the memo went to Carver, and Carver slapped a cover memo on it basically saying that the CIA headquarters didn't really agree with the Hovey memo. And this whole package went to Walt Rostow on the fifteenth of December, and the next day it went to LBJ. And LBJ clearly took note of it, because after that period of time he started saying to a number of people that sort of this kamikaze attack was going to occur. He told this to the Australian cabinet, for example, somewhere around Christmas Day, give or take a couple of days, in 1967.

Then the Hovey memo sort of dropped out of sight, because as January 1968 rolled around, there was an increasing interest in this threat to Khe Sanh, right up on the DMZ. And LBJ had a sand table put in his basement with a big damn map of Khe Sanh. The CIA situation room had the biggest map of Khe Sanh you can ever imagine; I mean it stretched across a whole wall. You could see trenches on the map, it was that big. The landing field was something like two feet long on

the map, which is enormous scale, and everybody--you know, we had cabinet officers come in and look at this landing field, look where the trenches were, and everybody forgot the bottom half of the country.

G: Was this an aerial photograph mosaic?

A: Well, no, it was a U.S. Army map basically.

G: Oh, okay. So these were drawn in, not photographed?

A: Oh, yes. It was a U.S. Army map, but there was a guy called Don Blasik [?] who, realizing that this had the intense interest of everybody, penciled in the trenches. And every time a marine stepped on a booby trap, Christ, there would be a red button go up. The map was a sea of red buttons and trenches and little boxes of infantry platoons and this, that, and the other. Everybody would come in and stare at that thing, their noses on it to see if they could get even closer to Khe Sanh. And the bottom 99 per cent of the country was more or less forgotten.

There were indications occasionally that came in from the field, and a marvelous memo written by the National Security Agency on the twenty-fifth of January 1967 which said, "Hey, everybody, it's about to hit the fan." But by and large everybody was concentrating on Khe Sanh, and of course starting--whenever it was--the twenty-fourth of January on the capture of the Pueblo. One of the things I'm seeing in the [White House Daily] Diaries right now is that during this period of time everybody was talking Pueblo, Pueblo and Khe Sanh.

G: Exactly. And wondering if they were connected.

A: And wondering if they're connected. I think they might well have been. I think the Vietnamese might have gone over to their friends the Koreans and said, "Hey, how about doing something horrible up there so you can get the Americans to think of something else." In any case, whatever it was, it worked, because at least in Washington nobody was expecting a huge Tet offensive except maybe me and George Allen, who was my boss, and a little coterie of people who were paying attention to Joe Hovey's memo. And when the Tet offensive hit Washington, everybody--at least that I could see--was just absolutely appalled at this steamroller that appeared to be coming over our positions in Vietnam.

G: Something that's always puzzled me about Tet is what happened at Hue.

A: Yes, what about it?

G: The North Vietnamese regulars appeared to have been the major actors at Hue but nowhere else, except at Khe Sanh, for example. And yet we know that there were other North Vietnamese units in the country. What's going on there? Why is that so?

A: You've got me on that one. Basically I think it primarily has to do with availability of troops. I think they wanted to make a big bash at Hue. There weren't enough Viet Cong troops, what we call Viet Cong troops, in the area to capture Hue, so they called in the North Vietnamese. Now if you go down to Saigon, when they had the 5, 7 and 9 Divisions, you had a lot of southerners running around there, and in most other areas you had enough southerners to pull it off. But basically when you have a--all the guys around Khe Sanh, for example,

although they did not attack on the day of Tet there was a lot of activity up there, all those guys were North Vietnamese. I don't know why they chose to do it that way.

Let me stick in by way of a short digression my view of how the communists look at things. I am now pretending to be a guy up in Hanoi looking south, and their personnel system--and I've done a lot of work on their personnel system, and I expect it has to do maybe with the way they handle operations--has to do with available personnel and available units. This is why, of course, you will find an increasing reliance on North Vietnamese infantry soldiers in the north, and the further south you go the more ethnic southerners you get. However, as the war went on, Christ, North Vietnamese would be assigned to Viet Cong units, so-called Viet Cong southerners would be assigned to North Vietnamese units as fillers. And basically this is a reflection of their view of Vietnam. They call it the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, not North Vietnam or South Vietnam. The fact that this is one country and you shove anybody in who's around.

G: Another thing that puzzles me is the Tet attacks which, despite the disclaimers, were largely a surprise, partly I guess because of the way they went into the cities. I think most people had not expected that. That was relatively unprecedented, was it not, the large-scale attacks on the cities?

A: Yes. Every once in a while they'd run into a city, but this was all over the whole country, countrywide, yes.

G: One claim that has been made is that this represented something on the order of a maximum effort. Is that true?

A: Clearly no. This in fact is what is being claimed now, but it wasn't back then. This claim that I've heard is silly, and for this reason, and you can see it very clearly by looking at American casualty statistics. The so-called Tet offensive, it is claimed, lasted, what, three weeks, 1 through 21 February--?

G: Until the end of the battle for Hue, I guess.

A: Yes. Hue fell on 23 February, or somewhere, give or take a day, three weeks long. Okay. I'm now quoting a rough approximation of American casualty statistics. Prior to the Tet offensive, 1966, first few weeks of 1967, American KIA were running between a hundred and a hundred and fifty [per week]. Every once in a while you'd get a two hundred-week, right around in there.

G: You said so many killed per week?

A: So many killed per week. Whammo! Tet hits 30 January. The American killed pops up to approximately four hundred a week, that is the first week in February, the second week and the third week. Four hundred a week. That is supposed to be the length of the Tet offensive. However, continue to look at American casualties: four hundred a week for the last week in February, first week in March, second week in March, third week in March, fourth week in March, all running around four hundred. They dip a little bit in April to around three hundred a week, still something like double the casualties prior to Tet. Then, whammo, May hits. There are as many casualties in May as there were

in February, American casualties. So this damned offensive didn't last three weeks, it lasted four months. So what you're asking, was this a maximum offensive? If you identify the offensive as lasting three weeks, no, the thing lasted for four months, and it still continued on. I mean, there was another bash in August. And of course the war lasted until 1975. So I mean, to me that idea you're hearing is nuts.

G: Okay. What about the claim that the casualties that the other side took during this period had the effect of making it more and more a North Vietnamese war because the southerners lost irreplaceable assets?

A: I think there is a lot to that in the sense that more and more ethnic northerners were thrown in as cannon fodder. And that is because of the enormous casualties that the communists took at Tet, southerners and northerners. There was a lot bigger pool to draw from up north than there was down south. It is true that the Viet Cong manpower pool was shrinking because pacification, particularly towards the latter half of 1968, was beginning to take effect more than it had been before that. And in order to keep up a military pressure, Hanoi, again looking from the point of view of Hanoi, had to feed in more northerners.

I don't think, however, that Tet destroyed the Viet Cong organization at all. I did a study starting in early 1969--it took me about a year and a half to do--which addressed mostly the Viet Cong subversive and espionage structure, and that thing was thriving. 1969 and

1970, it was going like a house afire, except it never got counted because you couldn't see it. This is true so often in the war, is that these people were difficult to count because you couldn't see them, and very often when they made efforts to go underground, we'd say, whee, we're winning the war. All they'd done is just perhaps gone over to GVN territory and taken their Viet Cong T-shirt off and put some kind of disguise on and continued what they were doing, or maybe just laying low.

G: Who were the primary units used in the assaults at Tet? Were these guerrillas local force, main force, or who were they?

A: The prime units used--well, all kinds of units were used. One group they used a great deal were the small, elite units: sappers, special action, combat engineer. They used, of course, regular infantry units all the way ranging from NVA regiments up in Hue to these so-called Viet Cong units around Saigon. There were all kinds of guys used.

Another group that was used, of course, was the self-defense militia. These normally were not--part of them were upgraded to become cannon fodder assigned to Viet Cong or North Vietnamese units as either infantrymen or box carriers or whatnot. Others of them, for example, came in behind the North Vietnamese at Hue. There were, according to one captured Viet Cong document, fifty self-defense units used in Hue alone. What these fifty did was to participate in the so-called Hue massacre. A lot of these South Vietnamese government officials were tied up and shot behind the head. Three thousand of them or so of men and women and children were killed, rounded up by

self-defense militiamen and killed by Viet Cong secret policemen, and neither the self-defense militiamen nor the Viet Cong secret police were listed as enemy in the OB. And the militia were used extensively throughout the Tet offensive, not generally as running ahead, throwing satchel charges, but coming in behind carrying boxes. Some of them were armed for the occasion, others were, Christ, given machetes and rounding up people. There was a whole mess of them in Saigon. They were collecting GVN ID cards.

G: Okay.

(Interruption)

Thomas Powers in a letter to CBS says that what happened at Tet dramatically confirmed your claims.

A: Good old Tom Powers. (Laughter)

G: Would you be specific as to what you think he means by that? Is it because of the numbers involved? Is it because of new units that popped up?

A: Let me go back to this DePuy briefing. I don't think the Viet Cong could have carried on a winter-spring campaign, that is, a campaign that lasted basically from, if you make the beginning of it the Tet offensive, 30 January, on through June, a good chunk of June, they couldn't have done that with anything like the number of people carried in the Viet Cong-NVA order of battle. So I presume that's what he has in mind.

G: Before we leave Tet, you said that you were dealing not only with enemy capabilities but intentions at this crucial time. If you can

discard everything you've learned since and remember what it was you knew at the time, what did you think the enemy was trying to accomplish at Tet?

A: I think the enemy was trying to accomplish a big jolt to American public opinion. Now let me back away from that a little bit. I am sure--again, looking at Hanoi, pretending I'm in Hanoi--Hanoi would loved to have thrown out the United States Army. I really don't think in any realistic way that [Vo Nguyen] Giap or anybody on the top figured that they could throw five hundred thousand Americans into the sea. They may have hoped to foment a bigger popular uprising than they did. The extent to which there was a popular uprising was relatively small, probably smaller than their best hopes. But I think basically what they were trying to do was exactly what was said in the Hovey memo written before Tet. The offensive was designed to jolt American public opinion right before the American elections, and in my view they succeeded in spades in doing that, and I think that's what they were trying to do.

G: Okay. To what extent did they succeed, to what extent did they fail, in their own eyes?

A: One thing about the Vietnamese communists is that if there is an easy way to get up a mountain and a hard way, they'll always go the hard way and they always expect to go twice as fast as anybody else. Their hopes and expectations are enormous. We read documents after Tet, "Oh, shit, it didn't work because we didn't throw the Americans into the sea. And Saigon is still in the bad guy's hands. We failed but

we got to try better next time." But I would think that a North Vietnamese planner up in Hanoi reading American newspapers at the time--which they did constantly; they read Newsweek, Time, they read everything--would say "You know, I think we did it." And when LBJ's speech came on the thirty-first of March 1968 I bet there were people up in the cabinet room wreathed in smiles. They probably said, "My God, you know, we're going to pull this thing off," and I believe them and I think they did. I think it worked. 31 March speech to me handed them the war, because ever after that we were looking for ways to get out, to pull out. I realize that there are a couple of ten thousand reinforcements after that, but never any increase. We were always looking for ways to wiggle out of the thing, and we did and they won it. I think they won it at Tet.

G: The official MACV estimates that I have seen say that at the most eighty-seven thousand, I think, enemy troops participated in the Tet attack.

A: Yes.

G: And at a minimum sixty-five thousand.

A: Yes, okay.

G: Does that more or less coincide with what you recall from the--?

A: Yes, absolutely, eighty-four thousand is their maximum and I think it was sixty-five minimum.

G: And I think General Westmoreland finally settled on a figure of something like forty-five thousand killed in action, although I think he had a caveat saying "of course we don't know how many of these may be

porters or spear carriers or whatever," but forty-five thousand. Were you able ever to get a good handle on how many of those killed in action represented somebody that should be subtracted from the enemy order of battle?

A: The short answer is no. You look at a cadaver there and usually it had something missing like a leg. Half the guys wore black pajamas anyway. It was very difficult to get any kind of handle on who you were killing.

Now, let me just comment on something you just said. Westmoreland said there were eighty-four thousand at max committed at Tet. Again, he is talking about the first two or three weeks of this offensive. Okay, you can do this mathematically--this is a joke for me--if it took eighty-four thousand men to kill fifteen hundred Americans in the first three weeks, how many did it take to kill the other six or seven thousand through June? In other words, this notion that Tet stopped on the third week in February is baloney. Tet continued for another four months, which you can see by American and South Vietnamese casualty statistics. So this business of eighty-four thousand committed--okay, they committed eighty-four thousand to kill the fifteen hundred GIs, poor bastards, in the first three weeks of Tet. Who killed all the rest of them?

G: Right. Okay. Here's another anomaly. Tet began on the thirtieth of January with a series of attacks in what I think was called MR-5.

A: Yes.

G: And then the next day the attacks on the rest of the country began. Did something go wrong there? That surely wasn't deliberate.

A: The claim has been that something went wrong, and I cannot for an instant believe that that is the case. If anything, the Viet Cong are so bound to plans, the fact that the offensive kicked off on the thirtieth of January in Region 5, which consisted of the top eleven provinces of South Vietnam, and then kicked off in the rest of Vietnam the next day, it is inconceivable to me that somebody screwed up. Because you just look at the nature of the attacks when they took place in the southern half of the country. They're beautifully timed and coordinated and you can't tell me that somebody [said], "Oh, Jesus, this is the wrong day." I think they obviously had to be planned that way. If I may second guess, I don't know, the idea was to continue the American fixation on the northern part of the country. It was an add-on to the fixation, and it worked. We kept sending more troops up there all the time expecting some vast thing to happen up in the DMZ, which it never did, except for the fight up in Khe Sanh.

G: How much credence do you give the claim that the Americans were not all that surprised by Tet? They may have been surprised at the scope of it, at the coordination it achieved, and at the targets, which were cities, but they knew something big was coming and so on and so forth.

A: Clearly there was a lot of intelligence, both at the lower levels of the intelligence and perking up to the top, that something was going to happen. No doubt about it. I mean, Christ, you have the Hovey memo, which got up to the President, you have various cables that

started coming back around in December from Westmoreland. You have a number of other cables during that period in time, all pointed to the expectation that something was about to happen around the Tet period, before, during or after, but around then, sort of accurate. What has always struck me is how few there are. If everybody expected the roof to cave in, which is what it looked like--it didn't, but it certainly looked like [it] in the first three weeks of the offensive--we would have been talking about it incessantly. It would have been the subject of huge numbers of cables. But instead you only had this one or two here, a couple of three there. You have General Westmoreland as usual resisting the declaring of the cease-fire, at least up in the northern part of the country, for Tet. But if we had really been expecting what happened, this would have been the subject matter of virtually the entire correspondence during that period, and instead you only have a few cables here and there. You've seen those, I'm sure. Which isn't to say that we weren't expecting something at Tet. We weren't expecting what came.

G: Were you surprised by the attacks on the cities rather than the--?

A: Not really, no.

G: Now, the Hovey memo you said had specified that the cities were going to be targeted.

A: Yes. Perhaps I was exaggerating there. It did say they were going to hit the cities. I later talked to Joe about that--Joe Hovey is a good friend of mine--and I said, "Hey, Joe, you did it all. You said it would hit the cities," and, by God, it's in print there, they're going

to hit the cities. But Joe will say now, "My God, I said hit the cities, but I didn't think that!"

G: They're not going to send regiments into the cities. Yes. Do you think he was thinking of terrorism and small-scale attacks?

A: No, no. He specified it was going to be infantry attacks inside the cities. It wasn't up front, but it was down like page three or something like that. It was there. He was reading what they were saying in their documents and he got it right on the line. He was surprised, a lot of it, at the scope, because he, who wasn't working on capabilities, didn't realize that they had this juggernaut ready to roll. I was so damned busy at the time, I don't think I was surprised at all. I was sort of shaking my head the whole month of January. I could see all these units popping up all over the place. I used to run into Carver and say, "Hey look, for Christ's sake, here's three infantry battalions in this area we don't have in the OB." And he would say, "Yeah, well, geez, we'd better do something." "Well, what are we going to do?" I'd say. He said, "Well, we'll get to that." I said, "But, my God, this is all over the country. Something's going on." I can't say that I had a full concept of what was about to hit, but I had a pretty good idea what was coming. It wasn't an enormous surprise to me.

Incidentally, we haven't gotten to something I think is very important, [which] is the whole business of infiltration, which is the one element I have learned since then, the one big element. And I think it is the one area which comes the closest to being really bad

news as far as intelligence was concerned, because there were in Saigon several analysts, all the people that were working directly on infiltration saw that starting somewhere in September that the North Vietnamese had turned on the spigot down the trail and that the number of NVA soldiers coming down was not six, five, four thousand, it was something like twenty-five.

G: When did they realize this?

A: They realized it as early as September; late September they began to see that there was a very unusual amount of activity on the trail, and by early October, I would say, they were thinking in terms of fifteen, twenty thousand instead of the five or six thousand.

Now, none of this stuff showed up certainly at CIA headquarters. We did not know that this was happening. I began to feel that something was way out of whack. I didn't work on infiltration. Infiltration is a very complex subject and there's piles of stuff coming in and I just didn't have time to look at all this stuff. And the raw material was coming in but there was no analysis of it. The one thing I did do is that starting in November, after the signing of NIE 14.3 on the thirteenth, I started addressing the subject of the main and local forces and began seeing all these new units pour--I wouldn't say pouring down the trail, because I didn't see that, I saw them popping up in Vietnam. I could see battalion strengths increasing, going from four hundred and fifty men up to six hundred, which indicates that they were planning to do something. I didn't make the intellectual connection that this indicated that the spigot had been turned on.

I might say that the nature of the influx was primarily fillers. It's like every command in the history of war, when you know you're going to fight a big battle, you send on a lot of cannon fodder and replacements so that when a unit gets hit you can shove replacements back, and I think they had this mass of replacements coming down. A few new units, but primarily replacements. And then of course a bunch of divisions around Khe Sanh, too.

G: Let me make sure I understand what you're saying about infiltration now. That, if I read you right, there was a great increase in infiltration. The analysts in Saigon who were working on it saw signs of it. That the nature of it was primarily North Vietnamese fillers to whatever units needed replenishment--

A: Yes. Basically they would go down to replacement centers, like there was something called the 90th Training Regiment right outside of Saigon. This was the direction to which these troops were going, units like this, depots basically.

G: And that these people were then plugged into existing units with some exceptions you were saying. There were some units--

A: Some new units were [inaudible].

G: Down the trail through the DMZ?

A: Well, there is a whole--the trail, of course, is a big complex of roads that basically goes down as far as what's called the B-3 front, Gian Lai [?], Kontum, Dak Lac [?], using the Viet Cong terminology, Pleiku, Darlac and Kontum. Yes, these guys were coming down the

trail, and then a lot of them were walking down as far as Saigon as well. I'm afraid I got [inaudible].

G: No, that's fine, that's fine. Something still is bothering me.

A: Sure. Go ahead.

G: Now, the units who participated in the assaults, except in Hue, were what we would call Viet Cong units.

A: Yes.

G: Now I have the impression that the communists made a genuine effort to use southerners in these assaults because they wanted people who spoke the dialect and had some people at least in the unit who might be familiar with the layout of the city, using local boys so to speak, as opposed to somebody with a Bronx accent coming down to liberate Augusta wouldn't be well received. How does this fit the picture that I am now getting of Viet Cong units swollen with North Vietnamese fillers?

A: Well, they don't have to be originally swollen with North Vietnamese fillers. You can have Viet Cong units--well, yes, you can have some North Vietnamese in there, sure. Because if you have a bunch of Texas boys and there's a few Bronx types in among them, there's always a lot of Bronx types down in Saigon; there were a million refugees, so it's nothing really wildly unusual. It would be very unusual to have a whole regiment of Bronx-speaking people show up in the middle of Saigon, which is what happened. Regiments did show up in Saigon, released battalions showed up in Saigon. You can't have a whole batch of them showing up. I think it's a very good likelihood that

what you say is true, that in order to get all these guys into the cities you have to have local boys primarily.

Incidentally, this is another aspect of this, the question of how they got these guys in the cities, I mean, they didn't come in the cities that day, they were already in there, at least in the case of Saigon. Some other places it was different.

G: They came in with the Tet traffic.

A: They came in with the Tet traffic, and that is something--this is not just a casual thing that these guys sort of amble in. There was a big organization that got them in there. This was the so-called infrastructure that managed to get caches of weapons inside the city, which guided these guys inside the city, which gave them safe houses to stay in for a couple of days so they weren't wandering around with their AK-47s. And you had this great big enormous organization within Saigon not counted in any strength estimate that was giving aid and comfort to--I don't even know how many battalions, what, eleven, twelve battalions showed up in Saigon.

G: A lot.

A: A lot of them.

G: Here's a general one that you can run with, if you want. This was a civil war in many respects.

A: In some respects, yes, many.

G: Certainly the North Vietnamese considered it.

A: Well, we called ours a civil war, and that was primarily a North-South venture. Go ahead.

G: How many people have a foot in both camps in a situation like this?

A: I would say in the South--in the North probably nobody.

G: Well, we're not fighting on the ground in the North anyway, so let's just consider the South.

A: Okay, just the South. There's a lot of people. You know, you had not a whole population with their finger stuck in the wind, but anybody in their right mind that sees a war going on with both sides within a half a mile of them, if not five feet, have to think of the future. And this is one of the problems, is that everybody, at least in GVN territory, was constantly trying to figure the odds. But, and here's the big but, this took place primarily in GVN territory. In Viet Cong territory there were a lot of people clandestinely testing the winds with their fingers, but they were keeping their nose clean, and there's a reason for this, and the reason is that the communists had an extraordinarily efficient secret police system, much like the KGB in Russia or the Ministry of Public Security in China, which reaches all the way down to your block, if not your house. And the GVN's was just sort of a sloppy, slapdash thing that was glued together, and nobody really had to worry about what a South Vietnamese cop was, whether he knew or not, because he also had his finger in the wind and he probably also had connections, either serious or not serious, with the Viet Cong. So it was an entirely different problem on either side.

G: Right. I've heard that the security system in Havana in the early days was basically modeled after the KGB.

A: Oh, yes. It's a wonderful system for doing what it was trying to do. I mean, it really works. Hell, it's the old cell system, started up God knows when, but the communists have perfected it, and they did very well with it in Vietnam. It was very difficult to get a spy in Viet Cong territory. We had a tiny number, the CIA did. Army had a tiny number, too. We had a lot more on the books but they were paper mills and whatnot. Whereas their espionage and subversion system permeated South Vietnamese territory. It's a tribute to their secret police, among other things.

G: One piece of current intelligence that some students of this period make a lot of is the POW testimony of a defector named Colonel [Tran Van] Dac--

A: Yes, right. Showed up right before the May offensive.

G: Yes. Defected I guess a couple of months after the initial wave of attacks.

A: Yes, right.

G: The part of his testimony that these people focus on is what seems to be saying that the local VC organizations that were reported were really skeletons of what they were purported to be. This is laid down to excessive optimism on the part of the field operatives, just as we had the same problem, I suppose, even in the early days. Did you get his material at the time?

A: Yes, I read a lot of Dac's stuff, and I am a good friend of the guys that did the lengthiest interrogation.

G: Who was that?

A: A guy by the name of Larry Pennsinger. He was an enlisted man who by some fluke was sort of let off work; he worked for the political order of battle section.

G: Would you spell his name for us?

A: Pennsinger, P-E-N-N-S-I-N-G-E-R, and I'm not sure whether there's one or two Ns in the Penn-singer part of it. Larry. And he talked with Dac at great length. He doesn't get this same impression of a moribund or shattered organization that apparently other people have. Now, I don't want to knock Dac at all; I think very highly of the guy. But he was a defector, and defectors do tend to tell what people want to hear. I don't want to discount him too much, because no doubt there was clearly a big rent put in the Viet Cong organization as a result of Tet. They lost a hell of a lot of people. I certainly wouldn't want to be the one to say that didn't happen, because it did happen clearly.

G: Well, now Dac, though, is saying that this situation existed before Tet, that when he was traveling around making the pre-Tet preparations, you know, touching base with all the locals and parceling out missions and so on and so forth, that he was appalled to find that he didn't have the resources that he thought he had.

A: Well, I don't--you know, I never talked to the guy. It's very difficult to put what somebody like that says into perspective. You know, when he says that he didn't have the resources that he thought he had, could it be--I don't know, I don't want to put words in his mouth--that he was expecting more? Was he expecting the moon and the moon

wasn't there? But nonetheless, they got eleven damn battalions into Saigon, and they did it and everybody had the pants scared off of them.

One way to visualize the Viet Cong organization and how it worked is to look anywhere at an order of battle map of Vietnam. Just envisage a map of Vietnam. Now, in World War II you could envisage an order of battle map and you have little lines of divisions facing each other. You look in Vietnam and these units are all over the place. Now, somehow they have to exist. They have to get things to eat, they've got to get medicine, they've got to get ammunition, a whole bunch of stuff like that. How do these units manage to stay out for years in areas? Point to a section three miles from here outside of Austin--which is what happened--three miles outside of Austin and you had the same goddamned Viet Cong regiment sitting out there for five, ten years. Somehow that thing exists. I mean, they don't just sit there; there has to be some kind of clandestine organization going on there. Now it may be a good one or it may be less than satisfactory, which is what Dac said, but it's there and it works in varying degrees in different areas. I don't know if that answers your question, but. . . .

G: Yes. Yes, it does. Perhaps the best known work on the Tet episode is Don Oberdorfer's book [Tet!]. Could you give me your evaluations of Oberdorfer's synthesis?

A: Okay. I think it's a marvelous book for something written at the time. It took place in 1968--when was it, 1971, something like that?

G: Early seventies.

A: Early seventies?

G: Within three years anyway.

A: Yes. A hell of a good book for that. Basically an extremely good book I think, particularly when you consider when it was written. There are problems with it. He buys, for example, the eighty-four thousand argument, you know, there's only eighty-four thousand, and he doesn't really conceptualize that the thing lasted a lot longer, which you can see by looking at casualty statistics. He does not, it seems to me, lay proper emphasis--as almost nobody does, so he's not at fault--about how the thing happened, how you managed to get this--I've been using the word juggernaut, and that's inaccurate because it looks like something's coming in from outside. The juggernaut was right inside. It popped up. How did all this damn thing get there? How did they manage this real feat of arms? There is nothing like it in history. In little areas every once in a while, but you've got a whole country, everything, whammo! This pops right out of the woodwork, this enormous thing. This concept really isn't in his book, but it's in almost nobody's book. The question of how they manage to pull this kind of stuff off is amazing, is a very pertinent one, is very center in the Vietnam War and how it was conducted. Now let me draw back and say I think his book was really good.

G: Okay.

A: And I think he gets to many of the main issues, and I think he's got--<u>the</u> main one was the nature of who won it and why, and I think he

approaches it very well. My opinion is that Tet was a wonderful success for the communists in that they gained what they hoped to gain probably pretty much the way they thought they would gain it. They didn't get everything they wanted by a long shot. But I think what it did is it really created a revolution in American public opinion. I think you can almost say that 31 March date is a watershed in American history because after that date, at least for a long period of time--it's changing now--Americans did not believe what their government told them. Before then they tended to; after that they tended not to.

Terrible digression, but it's something that really hit me. I gave a talk at Madeira School right outside of Washington--it's a little private school for rich girls outside of Washington. I came early and I was sitting around one of their anterooms before I went up to the class--it was a small affair--and I had a look at their yearbooks. I looked at the yearbook for 1967 and there in June 1967, the class pictures, they were all little girls dressed in tidy uniforms, all with the same little white blouse and shiny shoes and everything like that. Then the 1968 yearbook they looked like something out of San Francisco, Haight-Ashbury, everybody had long hair, was slopping around. There was a revolution that occurred there. We're only now beginning to draw away from it. Basically it involved America's distrust of its government, and I think that's what they attained at Tet.

And this is why I think the order of battle question is an important thing, because nobody understands this crazily complex order

of battle dispute, except that there was a conscious deception going on before then. They were trying to portray an enemy which was going downhill, which really wasn't true, because it was building up very rapidly for a Tet offensive, and then when Tet hit sort of the roof caved in on American public opinion. They didn't know anything about the order of battle dispute. All they had been told is that things were going pretty well and whammo! The appearance was that it was going extremely badly and the Viet Cong communists, whatever you call them, had not only managed to create that appearance but there was enough reality to the appearance that they basically convinced the American public it would be a good idea to do something else. That they didn't know what they were doing.

G: How much lead time do you suppose it took the communists to put the Tet thing together? When do they have to start getting this ready?

A: Well, I don't know. I would say no later than June 1967, no later than that.

G: At least six months, six, seven months then.

A: It would be at least six, seven months, because you've got to do the planning--okay, you've got to get ready the infiltration pipeline, get the units ready and get the replacement packets together in order to start shoving them down, in September. So you need at least a couple, three months for that. You've got to get the planning--planning takes forever, particularly among the communists. We can do planning a lot quicker because we've got all this radio stuff, but they have to get plans down there and understood way before we do. And there's a

reason for it, because they don't have radio communication. They've got to practice things incessantly, which they do. So you've got to have all this thing done well ahead. I say June, it might have been before that. I can't conceive of it being much--

G: It would fit with a visit that was made that was supposedly an arms agreement, at which an arms agreement was reached with the Russians, who to a certain extent at least bankrolled Tet with arms and so on and so forth, and that was in June of 1967.

A: Could be. I mean, an undertaking that complex, which Tet was, it was a terribly complicated maneuver--this is why I don't believe there was some big blunder that went oops. The southern half of the country all managed simultaneously to screw up by one day. This complex type of operation, which involved more than just infantry, it involves a clandestine structure to get all these guys in there, has to take a long time. D-Day, for Christ's sake, took, what, a couple of years really to plan. In essence the Tet offensive was not unlike in scope for the North Vietnamese as D-Day was for us. I mean, it was a big darn thing that they had to spend a lot of time on.

Tape 2 of 2

G: If you were getting ready to do the CBS special today, what would you do differently and what would you do--?

A: Well, I think I would come to the LBJ Library among other things.

G: Why?

A: You've got good stuff down here. What would I do different? Not a hell of a lot. I mean, we did the best we could with available

material. It was trying to convince certain people to come on and tell their stories. And we got the basic story told I think in a pretty straightforward manner. I suppose personally I probably would have--I did everything through George Crile--worked closer with Mike Wallace, not in the sense of a continuing day-by-day arrangement, but to talk to him more. I only talked to him a couple of times during the whole year period, and I probably should have kept more in touch with him. Not to end run George Crile, but simply so Wallace would know what my feelings were on given subjects, too. George and I didn't have any serious disagreements, but it would have been a better thing if there had been more give and take among the principals. There's more give and take now that we're all defendants in this law case.

G: One objection that could be made to the testimony of the MACV analysts is these are relatively junior people, they're good at what they do, but because of the nature of compartmentalized intelligence work they don't have the big picture. We at the two and three-star level have access to information that they don't have, and that's why we're discounting some of their stuff. Now, that's hard to prove, but this has been alleged.

A: I've just got to say baloney! And here's why I say it, I don't say it just for the hell of it. To begin with, let's go over who these people were we talked to. General Joseph McChristian, head of Westmoreland's intelligence up until the first of June 1967, higher than which you cannot go, up until that point. Colonel Gains B.

Hawkins. Now, admittedly he only has a bird on his shoulder, but he was the head, not the deputy head, but the head of the order of battle section for MACV J-2, the man that was running all numbers. Colonel George Hamscher, the chief observer on order of battle matters for CINCPAC. Lieutenant Richard MacArthur [?], apparently a low-level guy, but the man in charge of the guerrilla estimate, then one of the three main components of the order of battle. He was the only guy working on this subject in MACV headquarters. Commander James Meacham, head of the order of battle studies component of the order of battle section, the man who put together the infiltration and guerrilla estimates. Lieutenant Colonel Russell Cooley [?], the man in charge of the infiltration section.

Now, all these people are people who clearly were in charge of these components. There's nobody on the face of the earth that knew more about these things than these guys did. Now, for a two or three-star to come in and say all of a sudden that he has some kind of higher information to me is fanciful. Nobody had more information than Colonel Hawkins did. Nobody had more information than McChristian did. You can make a case that other people were working on infiltration, but nobody kept the records that the infiltration people such as Russell Cooley did. So what we were doing was trying to get the very people working on these subjects to testify as to what was happening.

Now, where the problem is is where do these orders come from? How are they transmitted? Who gave them? What was the perception of

the giver of the order and of the receiver of the order? Now, this is where things become more cloudy and the reason is that none of these orders were written. Any kinds of orders that have a smack of illegality or immorality, if you want to use that word, which I often sort of cringe from, are almost automatically given by word of mouth rather than written down. So you have all these ambiguities as to the giving and taking of orders.

G: Okay, here's another objection. The data upon which order of battle is created is freely disseminated through a wide spectrum of the intelligence community. If there is a conspiracy, it's got to be a huge conspiracy, because lots of people have access to the same data. So how come for instance DIA, using the same data, doesn't come up with CIA's estimate?

A: There's a very good reason for that. Because the data was coming in from Saigon to Washington. It came in by the bushel basket full every day. Surely four or five inches at least of paper came in my in box every day from Vietnam, so the data was clearly there. When you extrapolate, however, five inches--you don't extrapolate, you multiply five inches times three hundred and sixty-five for a year, you have one big batch of paper. This is why analysis is so important. You have to have somebody go through that paper and come up with a number. Basically what was happening is nobody was going through the darn stuff back in Washington except me. It's really the reason I became the focal point for so many arguments, because I was the only one assigned to go through the paper.

Where this argument is used, that there was no deception because the raw data was coming in from Washington, is most frequently made concerning infiltration. And it is true enough, I guess, that most but not all raw data concerning infiltration reached Washington, but there was nobody in Washington that was going through the stuff in a methodical manner, and you've got to do that because of the very complex way that the infiltration--well, it wasn't very complex, but the huge numbers of details that had to be mastered in order to make a sensible infiltration estimate. There were detailed numbering systems for the packets coming down. In order to understand overall numbers, you had to understand the numbering system, and in order to understand the numbering system you have to be able to sit down with it for days, weeks, and this wasn't done in Washington. So it was easily possible for MACV to send back an infiltration estimate of, say, six thousand and have the infiltration estimate land on somebody's desk, and what always happens is that not having done the work themselves, they'd have to use the one number that apparently had had some kind of backing to it, so people used MACV's number. Even though, had they themselves looked at this material, they would have come up with conclusions similar to those that the infiltration analysts had in MACV.

Now let me just expand on this just a little bit. This was done a little bit. There was a guy in CINCPAC who sat down with the raw data in the months before Tet, a navy commander whose name I've never been able to learn but who has been mentioned at some length by

Colonel Hamscher, who worked out at CINCPAC, who sat down with some of the raw data and started coming up with sky high estimates and went around trying to peddle his story around CINCPAC. He was told, "Hey, look, they do this stuff in MACV. This is not our job." Another thing that happened is that the CIA--and I know this because I was working in the office at the time where this occurred--began after Tet to do its own infiltration data estimates and were coming up with very high numbers, but the numbers they were coming up with were similar to those in MACV because the MACV estimates were more or less, by this time, after Tet, pretty honest and very high. But the same analysts, by the name of Douglas Parry, P-A-R-R-Y, Joseph Stumpf, S-T-U-M-P-F, and Ronald Smith, began to look at the old data and concluded that in the months before Tet the infiltration data indicated that the numbers were more like those that the infiltration analysts in MACV were reporting than the official figures. In other words, they were more like twenty thousand than they were six thousand, the MACV official figures.

G: Was there a lag time associated with infiltration statistics?

A: Here we're getting into an area where there are security problems, but let me go along with my white cane here and try to stay on the right path. There were lag times if you used only collateral sources, that is sources such as captured documents, prisoner interrogations, agent reports, trail watchers, overhead photography, people with binoculars and stuff like that. There were time lags--not people with binoculars--but there were time lag problems. If you used only that kind of

source, usually it was several months before you got a pretty good reading. However, sometime in 1967 well before Tet, we began to get data that was not old. It was on-time data. And it was basically this on-time data that the MACV infiltration analysts, combining it with their collateral data, it was basically this stuff that led them to believe that the infiltration estimates were in the neighborhood of twenty, twenty-five, thirty thousand instead of the six thousand reported.

G: They got this--

A: We call it Source X in the lawsuit, if that helps.

G: I'm trying to think of a question I can ask that won't be sensitive, because--

A: Well, a lot of this--

G: Let me put it this way. This data of immediate relevance, which is probably transmitted at something around the speed of light, what route did it travel to get to the MACV analysts? Did they receive this directly or did it come from some central overseas source and then it was relayed to them?

A: You really got me on that one, the exact way in which the information got back to Washington. Well, some of it went directly to them and some of it went back to Washington and came back to them. But the time involved was, you're talking about hours or at least a day rather than any kind of extended period of time.

G: Okay.

A: I can't say exactly. I couldn't trace the information as to where it went and how it got to them, but it got to them pretty quick no matter where it came from.

G: Let me be devil's advocate a little bit here.

A: Okay. By all means.

(Interruption)

G: All right, sir, here is the devil's advocate's objection. When they talk about this huge increase in infiltration, what they're really seeing is a massive movement of regular North Vietnamese divisions down to the Khe Sanh area and into Laos, and they're not sure whether to count this with the regular, traditional kinds of infiltration that we get down the trails feeding fillers into the South and so on. This is a new order of things. At what point do you count them? Do you count them when they hit the DMZ, or do you count them when they get into Laos, or do you count them only when they cross the border?

A: You count them basically when they enter South Vietnam. You don't count them until that, and it's pretty clear when a guy is an infiltrator and when he is not one. Okay. I know what you're talking about. The infiltration which the infiltration analysts such as Michael B. Hankens [?], Bernard Gattazzi [?], Russell Cooley, and so forth are talking about is by and large infiltration that is not headed for Khe Sanh. It is that which is west of Khe Sanh heading south. The Khe Sanh people are in addition to the people heading south. In other words, when they say that there is not just six thousand people who are infiltrating, there are fifteen, twenty,

twenty-five, thirty thousand, they're talking about people not headed for Khe Sanh.

Now let me stick in a caveat. There is some overlap because, after all, the border stretches on for a long distance and naturally the question comes as to when is a guy crowding towards Khe Sanh and when is he heading south, because there are a lot of points in between south and Khe Sanh. So there is a little overlap.

Now let me handle that, the problem of Khe Sanh. We have every reason to believe that the Khe Sanh infiltration was also underestimated. For example, official MACV statistics for the period of January 1968 indicate that something like I believe twenty-two thousand men infiltrated. This is in contrast with the previous months when it had been in the neighborhood of six thousand. This represents two North Vietnamese divisions, and which two I have known but I forget which. We have had information that the number of new divisions to come into that area was a) not in January, it was in November of 1967, and b) not two but four new divisions, not twenty thousand extra men but sixty or eighty thousand extra men.

So no matter how you sliced this, whether you're talking about just the Khe Sanh folks or you're talking about the infiltrators who were west of Khe Sanh who were heading for points south, the numbers are way, way, way higher than the official statistics. We have, for example, a document supplied by the LBJ Library in which General [Earle] Wheeler is telling President Johnson in March 1968 that the number of infiltrators in the period from late December 1967 to

late January 1968--another way of saying January 1968--was in the neighborhood of fifty thousand men. This is in contrast to the twenty-two thousand carried in the official statistics for that month, the one January. And we got this from you people. So there is all kinds of information indicating that there was a big wad of people coming down that weren't being reported.

G: Okay. We can come back to this in a minute. The only immediate thing I have is, you left CIA in what, in 1973?

A: Yes. May 17, 1973.

G: Were you still working on Vietnam at the end of that time?

A: By assignment, no. I was assigned to work on Chinese strategic thinking, but in actuality, yes, I was continuing to read the captured documents. Basically I had two jobs; I did both Chinese strategic thinking and stuff on the VC. I did not unearth a single Chinese strategic thought that somebody else hadn't gotten to before me.

G: So you were there in December of 1972 anyway?

A: That's right.

G: Which was the time of the Christmas bombing, so-called?

A: Yes, that's right.

G: What was the impact of the Christmas bombing? It has been read as having had nothing to do with what happened next, and it has been read as having a very profound effect on what happened next.

A: Okay. Basically I have to say you're out of my area of expertise. I didn't work on North Vietnam. My personal opinion is it had a hell of

an effect, but I don't know. This is based not on my own personal experience but on reading intelligence at the time.

G: Right. Okay. Well, let's talk about the 1972 invasion.

A: 1972 offensive?

G: Yes.

A: Now, there I know a lot about that. I was working on that one.

G: If you had to divide up the amount of effort that was put in by what we call VC units and North Vietnamese units, how would you divide it up? What importance were the VC playing in the overall offensive?

A: In the April 1972 offensive?

G: Yes.

A: You're talking about ethnic northerners as against ethnic southerners? Okay. There were a great many more ethnic northerners in that offensive than there were ethnic southerners, in both cases talking about communists. What percentage of ethnic northerners went over the top as against what percentage of ethnic southerners went over the top, I couldn't say, except to say that there were a lot more northerners. This has to do again with personnel availability; there were a lot more northerners left. However, a lot of southerners were used in the 1972 offensive.

This--I'm glad you asked that question--comes to another one of the big surprises. We weren't expecting the 1972 offensive either, and for one of the damnedest reasons imaginable, in my view. There were a number of reasons for the surprise: a) we managed to overlook the voluminous evidence which there was concerning movement of tanks

down the Ho Chi Minh Trail; b) we had not done our homework in Cambodia in 1970 and 1971. We had not realized that the communists, after the balloon went up on the eighteenth of March 1970 with the fall of [Norodom] Sihanouk, that in addition to the invasion of Cambodia by the 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions, plus the 1st NVA down south further, that after that there had been a massive advisory effort set up in Cambodia, and with that, the creation of a native Cambodian communist army, native but controlled primarily by Hanoi, not very effectively but controlled nonetheless in the sense that they ran the communications. What happened is that in 1970 and 1971 the communists, principally the Vietnamese communists, took most of their army out from the bottom half of South Vietnam, moved it over to Cambodia, and made it into an advisory system. By mid-1971, the summer and fall of 1971, they began to break up that advisory system, turn it over basically, the war in Cambodia, to the native Cambodians, to what was the Khmer Rouge, KC, and to reform the divisions which had been out of country for almost a year and a half.

One of the things that happened and one of the reasons for the big surprise--once again, the big surprise for the April 1972 offensive, when all of a sudden large numbers of troops showed up in the Saigon area, in the III Corps area, was that we had discounted the fact that this big advisory effort had dismantled. We didn't even acknowledge its existence, but that it had dismantled and formed once again into the big divisions which came rushing in, reinforced by tanks from the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which we also hadn't acknowledged

the existence of. Once again, we were caught flat-footed, I think, in the April 1972 offensive.

There is a marvelous memorandum, marvelous in its timing. I think it was written on the thirty-first of March 1972, which was the day before the April offensive began. The 31 March memo said, "There will be no big offensive coming up during this campaign season." And, whammo, the next day they came rolling in.

G: Whose estimate was that?

A: CIA estimate.

G: Current intelligence?

A: Current intelligence estimate, yes. It was a big thick thing. A lot of people had been working on it. We told the President that no such thing was coming. We didn't do that, the pre--

G: Who was running current intelligence at that time?

A: Oh, goodness knows. I think it was--was that Dick Lehman? I don't know who was running it.

G: Drexel Godfrey?

A: I think Drex had gotten out of there by then. I'm not sure. I'd have to look at my notes. I'm sure I know who it was. It wasn't his fault. By this time the manpower analytical section had sort of waffed it off and was working on other things and for that reason managed to overlook the dismantling of the advisory system--they had to overlook it because they didn't know it was there--and the influx from Cambodia back into South Vietnam of these large numbers of Viet Cong, primarily southern Vietnamese communist troops who had been away

basically during most of 1970 and the first half of 1971. It's one of the big reasons why the Hess [?] statistic looked so damn good at the time, because the bad guys were all over in Cambodia. Not all over, the worst of the bad guys were over in Cambodia.

G: Or the best of the worst guys, depending on your point of view.

A: To me the 1972 offensive is every bit as interesting in many respects as the Tet offensive was, except of course it didn't have the big impact. The Tet offensive won the war. The 1972 offensive was a close run thing. Just read the cables at the time. Even Joe Alsop wrote a column saying gee, you know, maybe the roof is caving in. And basically we bombed the offensive away. More tons of bombs fell during that offensive than I think fell during the European war. I may be exaggerating but not much.

G: Clearly you were a majority of one I guess at one point or other in the CIA over this issue. Is that stating it too strongly?

A: Yes, that is saying it too strongly. I was a political majority of one. Analytically most people agreed with me. You took the rank and file both of MACV and of CIA and basically they agreed with me. Colonel Hawkins agreed with me. Most of the people working in the order of battle section [agreed with me]. This is why before the TV show I was able to recruit so many people to come on board, because they agreed with me, not because they thought I'm a nice guy or they have some kind of deep psychological problem, but because they believed analytically I was correct. And I'm not saying it was big Sam Adams, I'm just saying there's a mass of data out there that

indicated one thing and most people agreed with it. Now, I got myself out on a limb because I kept making noises after the political decision had been made not to count these guys.

G: Commander Meacham, who is now I think working for the Economist, the last I heard--

A: Works for the Economist in London, yes, defense correspondent. Very good.

G: --gave some very damning testimony in the letters that he wrote to his wife. But in Burt Benjamin's after-action report he cites an interview with Meacham in which he says something to the effect that he is not suggesting that anybody was faking intelligence. Do you recall that?

A: Yes, vividly.

G: I'm at a loss to make any sense out of this.

A: Okay. I know Meacham quite well in the sense that I spent nineteen and a half hours with him in November 1977 interviewing him. It took four days to do. I didn't have a tape recorder; I wish I had. I interviewed him again when I went back to London, for about two or three hours. I had some correspondence with him and I saw and I got from his wife, with his permission and the wife's permission, some three hundred and twenty-two letters that he wrote to his wife in the period between July 1967 and July 1968. Commander Meacham has backed away from his letters. He said words to the effect that "these were snapshots I'm in no position to say there was falsification on." This is what he says now.

All I can do is to go back to the letters themselves, what he was saying at the time to his wife with no idea that anyone sometime later was going to read these things. Quote, "13 March 1968"--there's going to be mistakes in the quote, but not many--"You should have seen the antics my people and I had to go through to make the February strength estimate come out the way the General wanted it to. We plugged in all the numbers and fed in all kinds until we found the combination which the machine could digest and then we came out with the answer that we had to come up with to begin with." A paraphrase of his letter, but very close.

G: Which general does he mean?

A: Presumably General Davidson. He didn't mention it in the letter. I don't know. "21 March 1968. I am preparing a briefing on the February strength estimate for the press. It's due at five o'clock"--and now I'm beginning to paraphrase quite freely--"and the graphic birds are working on the slides. Never in my life have I assembled such a pack of truly gargantuan falsehoods. God knows what the reporters will think when we try to feed them this crap." Okay. Letters in June 1968: "The bunch from DIA are here and begin to smell a rat. They know we are falsifying the figures but they don't know which ones and how." Those are three badly quoted examples. I'm sure I could supply the text to you, the entire text. But this is representative of perhaps fifty or sixty letters out of a number of three hundred twenty-two, very direct testimony that he thought at the time that his section was falsifying the data.

Now, I didn't take these letters on their face value, which I could have, I think. I went to people who worked with him. I went, for example, to Bernard Gattazzi, who was basically his input-output analyst, and I talk about input-output in the sense of manpower balance analyst, how many casualties are there, how many infiltrators, so forth and so on. And I said, "Okay, Bernie"--it's Bernard Gattazzi--and I read him a letter, "You should have seen the antics my people and I went through to make the numbers come out the way the General wanted them to." "You remember that day, Bernie?" He said, "Oh, God, yes, that day. That thing was nuts. Commander Meacham and I, it got so bad we got in laughing fits. I would take the"--whatever you call them--"index cards and go into the computer room, and I'd tell the poor computer guy 'Okay, here's the number we're trying to get to. Let's feed and see if the damn thing works.' Then I'd come back to Commander Meacham, and the Commander [said], 'Bernie, we can't go with that. We've got to have a more logical way. This will never sell.' And so I'd go back in." And he said by the end of the day everybody was having a laughing fit because it was so absolutely insane. I did this with a number of letters. And Bernie was not saying, "Oh, no, that didn't happen." Bernie was saying, "This is what he is talking about." I went in much deeper than the letters themselves.

And you get other people from his section. Richard MacArthur, the guy that you weren't able to get hold of, his conversations with Meacham, Richard MacArthur had a horrifying experience for an analyst. On the seventh of February 1968 he left for Bangkok on R&R. You can

imagine, just right in the middle of the Tet offensive, he's taking off on R&R, rockets exploding on the runway practically.

G: All the more reason.

A: He had a toteboard on his desk and the toteboard had the number of guerrillas by province. Okay? There are forty-four provinces, and he had one entry for each province, a line at the bottom which read approximately eighty thousand. He can't remember exactly what it was. A week later, six days later, whenever it was, on the thirteenth of February he came back. His toteboard was no longer there. He asked Hankens, the infiltration analyst, and Gattazzi, the input-output analyst, "Hey, what the hell happened to my toteboard?" They'd slid it behind his desk. He pulled it out and to his amazement, the number at the bottom was no longer eighty thousand, it was more like forty thousand. And all the individual entries for the forty-four provinces had been changed. He just flew off the handle. He went into Meacham's office, he said, "Commander Meacham, what the hell's going on here?" Meacham thumbed him toward Weiler's office, Weiler being the head of the order of battle branch, the man who took over from Colonel Hawkins when Colonel Hawkins left in mid-September 1967. He went into Colonel Weiler's office and said, "Colonel, what the hell is going on here? Why did you change my numbers from eighty to forty?" And Weiler said, "Look, we had to, Mac." Weiler liked MacArthur. And MacArthur kept at him, said, "Colonel, that's no answer. I mean, why did you change the damn numbers?" And Weiler, and in a very kindly manner, said to him, "Mac, lie a little. Lie a little." MacArthur

snapped to attention, saluted him, said, "I refuse to do so, sir," saluted him and went out the door and very shortly thereafter he was transferred.

So all these things described in Meacham's letters happened, and they happened because the people who Meacham is describing in the letter told me they happened. So you can't go further than that. Now Meacham has backed away from these letters. What can I say? He hasn't backed away entirely; there are some episodes that he still stands by. There was an episode in which General Davidson and General Graham were trying to get him to manipulate the data base, the historical data base, and he got in a shouting match with them. And this shouting match is attested to not only by Meacham but also the guy that was with him, Cooley. Weiler was there, too, except Weiler has died. I spoke to him briefly some time ago but obviously wasn't able to interview him.

So all these things happened, other people saw they happened, and Meacham continues to support certain of the episodes. So I don't know how to do--I tend to go, as most researchers do, with contemporaneous evidence.

G: Okay. Here's the devil's advocate again.

A: Okay. Fine.

G: Let's assume that you are right in all particulars.

A: Okay. Let's make that assumption, which I don't buy.

G: And you take this into your boss and he says, "Okay, this will go upstairs," and upstairs says, "Good job. I'll take it to the next

Tuesday lunch." And he takes it to the Tuesday lunch and the impact that he achieved there was that there was at least twice as many of them as we thought there were, and the President says, "So what?" Doesn't make a particle of difference. What's your reaction to that?

A: Okay. My reaction right now, not having seen the notes on the Tuesday lunch--

G: Well, I haven't either. This is purely hypothetical.

A: All right. No, I buy your hypothetical question. First, I have to say that I have seen no evidence that ever happened. Now, notes may come up from the Tuesday lunch that that happened. Now let me make an assumption that, "okay, LBJ, they're flooding down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, there's twice as many little sons of guns out there as we've been saying all along," and LBJ says, "So what?"

G: I guess the fundamental thing I'm asking is what policy difference--

A: Would it make?

G: --would it make?

A: Okay. It depends on the period of time you're talking about. All this stuff, the order of battle stuff, was known basically by October 1966, November 1966. I had certainly come to all the conclusions that I stuck with throughout the next two years which eventually the CIA bought off on in toto and which certainly the analytical level in MACV have bought on, maybe not in toto but mostly. That time, in September 1966, you might have been able to do something dramatic, call up the reserves, send a lot more troops out there, decide to get out. It seems to me back then you could have done something. If this had

been found out in September 1965 or in mid-1965, early 1965, the information was out there in early 1965, we could have done that. It just wasn't looked at by and large. Then really dramatic things might have transpired. There might have been a whole different mind set, like this is a big problem instead of a handleable little problem. Everybody was saying, you know, if we just put in a hundred thousand more troops, that might be enough to do it. Maybe if back in 1965, the OB stood at around two hundred and five thousand when we were going in there, and I think the real OB, if you were counting the same people, really stood more like around half a million, four hundred [thousand], half a million. If you had come with this piece of information, it is conceivable that we might even have gone in like gangbusters or we might have decided to sit it out, let the communists take over.

The real answer to that question is there is no way of knowing. But the job of intelligence is to present the best estimate and then it's LBJ's problem. We were not doing, I don't think--it looked to me like we weren't doing our job. In the early period it was through inadvertence and neglect and so forth, just like all human failings. Christ, I spent a year and a half before I made my discoveries about this thing. I was using all this phony statistics, wrongly. You know, maybe 1966 we could have done something. 1967 it becomes harder. One thing we might have been able to do in 1967 that would have made a difference--I frankly think the war was winable--is to all of a sudden square with the American people, to go up and say to them,

"Look, this thing we've been discovering and been looking at it is a lot bigger problem than we thought it was. Blood, sweat and tears. Mobilize the reserves. We're going to have to mine Haiphong. We're going to have to have another hundred thousand troops so we can go and send a couple of divisions to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I appeal to you American people that this is the thing that has to be done. There is no light at the end of the tunnel right now, there might be later, but we've got to do this." But they didn't, they temporized. They fiddled around. They tried to make it look we were about to win and then, whammo, we got caught with our pants down in the Tet offensive. That 31 March date is when the Madeira girls decided they no longer wanted to wear their little uniforms, they all started looking like hippies. And the whole country--what I'm saying is the whole country changed its mind, not only about the war but about its attitude towards its government. How's that for a mouthful?

G: Peroration.

A: Yes.

G: Well, yes, LBJ could have--it's been suggested that he should have wrapped himself in the flag and declared a crusade.

A: Well, there's a whole number of questions here that you brought up by that, but the basic one as far as I'm concerned, as an intelligence officer, ex-intelligence officer, is that the job of intelligence is to present things to the higher-ups, not to the American public but to the higher ups. Shove it at them and let them worry about it. Now, I have been led to believe by what I have been seeing from the LBJ

Library--and the returns aren't all in, the files aren't all looked at--that LBJ--nobody ever grabbed his lapel, shook him, and said, "Look, buddy, this is what the problem is." That may have happened, which puts things in a somewhat different light. Then it becomes more a policy question of what LBJ does, how he approaches the problem. And let me say it's a very complex story and there's all kinds of deceptions, but more than that, self-deceptions going on at all levels.

G: Okay, here's another charge that has been repeated. Sam Adams got some captured documents, a very limited sample from a few provinces, and extrapolated from that to create a picture of what the VC organization looked like throughout the country and [it] was quite false because his sample was too small, untypical and so on. How do you respond to that?

A: Okay. In the beginning [it was a] true charge, has to be. You start with one document. There was one document concerning Binh Dinh that alerted me that there was a fly in the ointment. A week later there were about ten documents. A month after that there would be about twenty or thirty documents. By the time the crunch happened, which was in September of 1967--and let me just talk about the guerrilla estimate--there were thirty-eight VC provinces or province equivalents. Their provinces were slightly larger than the GVN provinces. We had readings concerning guerrilla strengths on almost thirty out of the thirty-eight, so that the extrapolation that I was doing applied

to basically eight provinces. If you have thirty with this many, what do the eight left have?

However, we also had countrywide readings on the guerrilla strength. We had three documents captured in different areas which came up with the same number for the countrywide number of guerrillas as of early 1966, a hundred and seventy to a hundred and eighty thousand. Okay? One of these three documents was broken down by region. The Viet Cong have six regions, Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and they had the number for each region with a bottom line that added up to a hundred and seventy thousand, and it went down to the last digit. One of the regions was Region 4. Region 4 is the area surrounding Saigon. Fortunately we had a set of documents for Region 4 independent of the countrywide documents, and the regionwide total for Region 4 was virtually within a couple of hundred guys of the reading in the countrywide document, which indicated to me that this countrywide document was--further led me to believe that it was accurate. So I didn't extrapolate just from one or two documents; there were, concerning the guerrilla estimate, maybe hundreds of documents if you include all the ones that just concerned districts and some region and countrywide, even the village documents used. Go ahead.

Also the main thing is that Colonel Hawkins agreed with me. By September 1967 I felt there were between a hundred and a hundred and twenty thousand guerrillas. His command was arguing for sixty-five thousand during an order of battle conference. During the break he came around to the other side of the table where I was, tapped me on

the shoulder and said, "Sam, I think there's a hundred to a hundred and twenty thousand," and he's testified to this under oath. So there you go.

G: How did CIA, as an institution, deal with the problem, from their point of view, of an analyst who was promulgating what by then must have been considered an unpopular position?

A: Pretty well. Okay, let me back away and look at it from afar. In over half the countries on earth I'd have been dead, shot. In England I would certainly be in jail. In this one my promotions did not go as fast as they might have before, but that's not a hell of a retaliation. Physically within the CIA I had the run of the place and I continued to. Whenever I wanted to go out for lunch I could go out for lunch; when I wanted to take on a vacation, I could go out on vacation. There were a couple of very petty harassments at one time from one or two people, which were immediately countermanded by my immediate bosses, and basically, talking from a personal point of view, the CIA from virtually every level treated me fine, no complaints whatsoever. Wish I had been promoted faster, but what the hell. When I see what could have happened, admired the place, frankly.

G: Does Thomas Powers' account square with your recollections of the way you were treated?

A: Well, it squares with my recollection partially because it's my recollections. He drew a lot on my Harper's article and a lot from--

although he did not take everything I said without checking it, he checked with a number of people.

G: Okay. So what happened? You left in 1973. Was this out of disgust or disillusionment?

A: Well, no. I had been carrying on this fight for so long. I can even tell you the incident frankly that convinced me to do it. I had been to every investigating commission known--I never went to the press--that was in existence that I knew about: the CIA inspector general, army inspector general, army adjutant general, CIA, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, congressional committees for this, that, and the other thing. THen I ended up in the [Daniel] Ellsberg trial, and I'm no big admirer of Ellsberg, but one of the big issues at the trial was his leak of what was basically an order of battle statistic. They tried to hang him for releasing this OB statistic, which was the very one that had been faked. So I waded in and said--while I was still at the CIA--you know, you're trying to hang a man for leaking fake statistics.

By the time 1973 had come around, I had gotten involved in so many controversies that I was sort of a walking dynamite keg and they were worrying that I was going to explode. People would cringe away from me in the halls. There was a tremendous amount of support in the analytical level and all throughout the front office, but they didn't know what the hell to do with this clown.

Finally I came back from the Ellsberg trial in March 1973 and there was a pink slip on my desk. I was being RIFed, reduction in

force, and I said, "What the hell am I being RIFed for?" Because my work wasn't as good as other people, I was being selected out. I said, "Oh, come on, this can't be true." So I went and tried to find out who RIFed me, put me on the RIF list, and nobody would 'fess up until finally I made them back down and take me off the RIF list. And it was somewhere around here that I decided to get the hell out. The big thing really that happened was on I think it was March 25, 1973--I think it was March 25--is that the last American soldier had left Vietnam. Here I was in the middle of a personnel fight in CIA headquarters. You know, May 17 was the day I left and the day that Sam Erwin's gavel banged on the Watergate hearings. Basically I was saying fuck it. This is no longer a fight that I should be carrying on. It's taking on the air of a personal battle, and I didn't want to mess with it, so I decided I'd just get out.

G: Who was the director then? Was Helms still director?

A: Oh, Christ, no. I think [James] Schlesinger happened to be in the slot right at that moment. Helms had just bailed out and Schlesinger--

G: Okay, Schlesinger was in.

A: Yes.

G: Well, there was a reduction in force going on then.

A: Oh, yes, there was one going on, sure. Yes. They were taking 10 per cent of the personnel out of there. But I was one of the 10 per cent, and clearly the reason I was put on there was not because I was not doing my job, because I had just finished--I was teaching all of the

Viet Cong courses for people going out to Vietnam, and I was working overtime all over the place and writing this, that, and the other stuff. It's just I'd become bureaucratically difficult to handle. I can't blame any of these guys for doing this. What the hell do you do with a clown like that? It's just things had gone too far and I didn't want to become a guy with a personnel problem.

G: Well, what have you been doing since?

A: Well, I had a farm. I've written a book, which is now on hold until the thing comes out. It's called, as I've mentioned, Who The Hell Are We Fighting Out There?.

G: What do you mean until the--?

A: Until the CBS v. Westmoreland--

G: The suit? That has to play its course before the book comes out?

A: Well, not entirely play its course, it has to get out of the fact level, after the facts are decided, presumably after the trial is over. I don't know, depends on how that goes.

G: Who is your publisher?

A: W. W. Norton, who is perhaps the most patient publisher in the history of the publishing industry. It's been waiting about eight years for the damn thing. But on the other hand, there's been a lot of good stuff come since then, because it was during this period that I did all of the interviews on which the TV program was based, and then since then gotten all this stuff concerning what actually happened on all levels. And still don't know, I mean we haven't got all the stuff

out of the LBJ Library. It's not your fault, it's the fact that there's just so much there.

G: Well, I know that the declassification team has been gnashing their teeth and spewing it out about as fast as they can.

A: Yes.

G: How has all of this affected Mr. Crile? I've heard stories that he's--

A: I think you have to ask George that. I think George has been terribly maligned myself. There is no doubt that there were problems with the putting together of the broadcast. Nobody contests that, and even George doesn't. But I don't think they were serious. And his misdemeanors, if you want to call them that, or peccadillos, that's what I would call them, interviewing George Allen twice. Holy God! What a Mickey Mouse charge. Compared to what went on back in 1967 and 1968 is like nothing! There are problems with the broadcast, and there are different interpretations you can put on it, but I think basically it was a very good broadcast. I think it was basically fair. Most of those people which were on it said they think they were treated fairly; Hawkins does, McChristian does, MacArthur does, Cooley does, Hovey does, I do. Meacham, he's backed away from his letters somewhat. Westmoreland thinks he's maligned enough to sue for a hundred and twenty million bucks, and Danny Graham has thrown in his two bits worth. But basically I think it was a very good broadcast. Crile I hope will get vindicated out of this. I think by and large he put together a very good broadcast.

I probably have the same feeling that a lot of intelligence and a lot of military people have, I think the press is a pretty sorry institution on a lot of things it does. The program, instead of being representative of the slipshod nature of the press, is an exception to it, a big exception to it. There was probably more preparation put into that broadcast than any broadcast that's ever been shown on television. We didn't interview just those seven people; we interviewed I think it was eighty. And so they're only the tip of an iceberg. So there you go. I hope George comes out of this okay.

G: Well, I think I'll pause here.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Samuel A. Adams

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Samuel A. Adams of Purcellville, Virginia do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on September 20, 1984 at LBJ Library, Austin, Texas and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

Samuel A. Adams
Donor

for [illegible] 25 April 85
Date

[signature]
ACTING Archivist of the United States

May 23, 1985
Date